THURSDAY ▸ JANUARY 15, 2026 ▸ VOL: 11 ▸ ISSUE: 181 ▸ PAGES 12 ▸ ₹2.00

CITY HILIGHTS

The Truth Speaks

IBC WORLD NEWS
CH ABC
Certified English Daily

Crane collapse derails train killing dozens in Thailand P8

www.ibcworldnews.com BENGALURU ▸ HUBBALLI ▸ MANGALURU ▸ MYSURU ▸ KALABURAGI cityhilights.news@gmail.com

RISING UNREST

'Leave Iran by any means'

India issues urgent advisory

The Indian embassy in Tehran also asked citizens to keep their travel and immigration documents ready

(Synopsis) Iran has been hit by anti-government protests in recent days, ostensibly over economic hardships, but leaders of Iran have blamed external intelligence networks of arming and funding insurgents to attack the country and create unrest.

TEHRAN

As the situation in Iran remains volatile with reports indicating over 2,500 deaths and widespread civil unrest, the Indian Embassy in Tehran on Wednesday issued a fresh advisory for its nationals currently in Iran to leave the country using available means, including commercial flights.

The notice serves as a significant update to the previous advisory issued by the Government of India on January 5, reflecting a worsening security situation across Iran.

"In view of the evolving situation in Iran, Indian nationals who are currently in Iran (students, pilgrims, business persons and tourists) are advised to leave Iran by available means of transport, including commercial flights," the embassy stated in its advisory.

There are approximately 10,000 Indians in Iran, including many students. Iran is also visited every year by thousands of Shia pilgrims from different parts of India.

Received a call from Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi. We discussed the evolving situation in and around Iran.
—S Jaishankar, EAM

Guidelines for citizens

The embassy has outlined several critical safety measures for Indian citizens and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) staying back in Iran.

- Avoid areas of protests: All nationals are reiterated to exercise extreme caution and strictly avoid areas of protests or demonstrations, and closely monitor news as well as the website and social media handles of the Embassy of India in Tehran.
- Stay connected with enbassy: All Indians should stay in constant touch with the Indian embassy in Iran and monitor local media for realtime developments.
- Keep documents ready: Citizens are requested to keep their travel and immigration documents, including passports and IDs, readily available with them.

Register with embassy

To avoid communication gaps, authorities have asked all Indian nationals in Iran, who have not yet registered with the embassy to do so immediately via the official portal (https://www.meaers.com/request/home). The link is available on the embassy website. "In case any Indian national is unable to register due to internet disruptions in Iran, their families in India are requested to do so," the statement added.

Emergency helplines

+989128109115;+989128109109;
+989128109102; +989932179359

Email: cons.tehran@mea.gov.in

Avoid travelling to Iran until further notice : MEA

New Delhi: The Ministry of External Affairs also advised Indians against travelling to Iran. In an advisory issued on Wednesday, the Ministry stated, "In view of the ongoing developments in Iran, Indian nationals are once again strongly advised to avoid travel to the Islamic Republic of Iran until further notice."

Tamil civilisation one of oldest in world: PM Modi

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi while greeting people of Tamil Nadu and Tamils across the globe on the occasion of Pongal on Wednesday said it's a shining symbol of the richness of Tamil traditions.

Attending the Pongal celebrations at the residence of Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan, Modi said Tamils have historically treated land like gold and nature like their own eyes.

The PM ceremonially prepared Pongal, chanting "Pongalo Pongal" marking formal inauguration of the celebrations. Around the world, the Tamil community and those who cherish Tamil culture celebrate Pongal with great enthusiasm, and he was proud to be among them.

"Tamil culture was one of the oldest living civilisations in the world and embodied centuries of wisdom and tradition that draw lessons from history to guide the way toward the future," he said.

"Inspired by this legacy, today's India draws strength from its cultural roots as it moves forward," he added.

Modi set to sound poll bugle in TN on January 23

Chennai: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will begin his campaign for the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu on January 23 by addressing a public rally alongside leaders of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The BJP wrapped up 2025 by stunning everyone with its electoral performance. In the beginning of the year, the party swept the Delhi assembly elections and wind up the year by reinstalling the 'Double Engine Sarkaar' in Bihar. After defending the North, it's time for the saffron brigade to battle it out to crack the south. After the PMK joined the NDA last week, the BJP and its ally AIADMK are making all efforts to AMMK and DMDK into the NDA fold.

'Extreme pollution in Delhi'

Danish shuttler pulls out of India Open

NEW DELHI

Badminton men's singles world No. 3 Anders Antonsen on Wednesday (January 14) said he pulled out of the ongoing India Open due to "extreme" air pollution in Delhi.

The four-time World Championship medallist paid a fine of $5,000 to the Badminton World Federation (BWF) for his decision.

"Many are curious why I have pulled out of the India Open for the third consecutive year. Due to the extreme pollution in Delhi at the moment, I don't think it's a place to host a badminton tournament," Antonsen wrote on his Instagram page.

He also shared a screenshot of Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) reading, which showed 348 and categorised the conditions as hazardous, on Instagram.Antonsen's move comes a day after fellow Dane Mia Blichfeldt criticised the playing conditions at the $950,000 event.

FLORAL FIESTA

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar inaugurated the Republic Day Flower Show at Lalbagh in Bengaluru on Wednesday. The 13-day show titled 'The Journey of Tejaswi', which will go on till January 31, will be a tribute to the life, literature and environmental legacy of polymath Kannada writer KP Poornachandra Tejaswi. ➤ CH PHOTO

'Zubeen Garg was drunk, declined life jacket'

SINGAPORE

Popular Indian singer-songwriter Zubeen Garg was "severely intoxicated" and had drowned off Lazarus Island in Singapore after declining a life jacket in September 2025, a police investigator told a coroner's court on Wednesday.

As per reports, Assistant Superintendent of Police David Lim, from the Police Coast Guard, testified that Garg had consumed alcohol and refused to wear a life jacket before entering the water from a yacht on September 19, 2025.

The singer initially wore a life jacket but removed it and later declined to put on a second one offered to him, the chief investigating officer told the court.

Garg (52), who was in Singapore to perform at the North East India Festival the following day, later became motionless and was seen floating face down as his friends tried to persuade him to swim back to the vessel, it stated.

Garg was promptly rescued back to the yacht and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) was administered to him. He was taken to Singapore General Hospital and pronounced dead later that day. The cause of death was determined to be drowning.

The singer had a medical history of hypertension and epilepsy, with his last known epileptic episode in 2024, the court was told.

KICKER: CRUISING ON EXPORT HIGHWAY

Maha topples TN to emerge as most export-ready state

CHENNAI

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have emerged as the top five export ready states of India, among the large states category, in the NITI Aayog's Export Preparedness Index 2024.

As per the index released on Wednesday, Maharashtra toppled Tamil Nadu from a slot it had held for several years, to become the Number 1 in 2024 ranking which takes into account performance during FY '22-F'Y24 The latest edition of the index shows Maharashtra consolidating its advantage across infrastructure, industrial depth, export outcomes and governance at a time when global trade conditions remain extremely uncertain and competition for markets is intensifying.

Maharashtra's rise to the top signals that it has been able to combine its long-established role as a commercial and financial hub with a more focused push on export-oriented manufacturing, services and logistics. A key driver of Maharashtra's lead has been the breadth of its export base. From automobiles, engineering goods and chemicals to pharmaceuticals, information technology and business services, the state benefits from a mix of high-value manufacturing and services that cushions it against volatility in any one sector. Mumbai and Pune continue to anchor financial, technology and design capabilities, while industrial belts across the state support large exporters and a growing ecosystem of smaller firms feeding into global supply chains. Tamil Nadu, which slipped to second place, remains one of India's strongest export engines, particularly in automobiles, electronics, machinery and textiles. Gujarat, close behind in third place, continues to leverage its ports

Key findings of EPI 2024 report

- Maharashtra secured the top rank among large states with a score of 68.01.
- Tamil Nadu followed in second place.
- The top five "leader" states are Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY CHANGE

NITI Aayog noted that the EPI 2024 rankings are not directly comparable to the EPI 2022 due to changes in the assessment methodology, which now includes a sharper emphasis on logistics, MSMEs, human capital, cost competitiveness, and access to finance.

KEY DRIVER

Maharashtra's success is attributed to its diversified export base, port-led infrastructure, and strong industrial ecosystem.

VB-G RAM G row: K'taka joint legislature session from Jan 22

BENGALURU

A joint session of the Karnataka legislature will begin on January 22, which will discuss the Central Government's move to repeal the MGNREGA, the Cabinet decided on Wednesday.

The session will revolve around the Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB—G RAM G) Bill, 2025, that replaced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The session is expected to be held from January 22 to 31.

Addressing reporters after the special Cabinet meeting, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said that the Cabinet had passed three resolutions.

"The joint session of the Assembly and Council will be held from January 22, and it was also decided to invite the Governor to address it. There will be a special discussion and a decision will be taken on the VB—G RAM G Act to create awareness about its socio-economic impact amongst people."

QUICK READ

e-Pass system launched for Republic Day event

Bengaluru

The government has launched an e-pass system for those who wish to attend the 77th Republic Day celebrations at Field Marshal Manekshaw Parade Ground on January 26. Bengaluru City District Magistrate G Jagadeesh said interested citizens can apply for e-passes by providing required personal information on Seva Sindhu portal (www.sevasindhu.karnataka.gov.in) till January 24, till 5pm. Pass holders must present either a printed or digital copy of the e-pass for verification at entry gate no. 5 of the parade ground.

KSTA honours 2 scientists with lifetime achievement awards

Bengaluru

Karnataka Science and Technology Academy (KSTA) presented lifetime achievement awards to two senior scientists: Ramakrishna, former director of Zoological Survey of India, in recognition of his contributions to science and technology; Sreemathi Hariprasad, former scientist at Central Food Technological Research Institute, for promoting science, technology, engineering, agriculture and medicine in Kannada language.

Rowdy sheeter brutally murdered

Bengaluru

A rowdy sheeter was brutally murdered in Silicon City. The incident took place in Mangammana Palya under the jurisdiction of Bandepalya police station. The murder of Shabbir, a rowdy sheeter, came to light late Tuesday night around 11 pm. The perpetrators committed the murder due to old enmity. The Bandepalya police have visited the scene and conducted an investigation.

Governor returns SC quota bill, delaying recruitments

The govt is set to make recruitments after passing the Internal Reservation Bill. However, the Governor has now sent the bill back asking for clarification

BENGALURU

Governor Thawarchand Gehlot has sent back the bill seeking comment on the internal reservation for Scheduled Castes. This is likely to further delay the recruitment process for vacant posts in various state government departments.

The government passed the Scheduled Castes Internal Reservation Bill in the Belagavi session held in December. The quota for Scheduled Castes was divided in the ratio of 6:6:5 among the various sub-categories of Scheduled Castes to ensure fair and equitable distribution of reservation facilities. The bill was sent to the Governor for his assent last week. The bill has been sent back to him seeking further clarification.

This development will affect the recruitment of many government departments. The recruitment process was waiting to start after the passage of this bill, and now it will be further delayed. According to sources, the government will fill more than 30,000 vacant posts in various departments including the police, health and education departments as soon as the internal reservation issue is resolved.

The government has put the recruitment on hold from October 2024, awaiting the implementation of specific recommendations made by the one-man commission set up under retired Justice HN Nagamohan Das on internal reservation of Scheduled Castes in various sub-groups of Scheduled Castes. The government has put these recruitments on hold following demands from SC-Left communities that the youth of these communities will suffer if the internal quota issue is not resolved by going ahead with the recruitments.

The commission submitted its report on SC internal reservation on August 4, 2024, which the government accepted with some modifications. It also recommended SC internal reservation quota in October 2025. However, the government has not yet issued guidelines for issuing caste certificates to identify categories within SCs. In the meantime, it had passed a bill to give legal effect to the order recommending internal reservation. Now that the Governor has returned the bill seeking further clarifications, the appointments will be further delayed.

CM Siddaramaiah calls for NREGA movement, slams BJP

BENGALURU

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah called for continuing struggle until the MNREGA Act is reinstated and the VB-G RAM G Act is repealed.

He was speaking at the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme Bachao Sangram pre-preparedness meeting organized by KPCC at Gayatri Vihar. This is a movement from the village level to the state level.

Last month, the AICC working committee meeting was held. The party has taken the cancellation of MNREGA very seriously. The central government has cancelled MNREGA and made a new law called VB-G RAM G. He complained that the central government was allergic to the name Mahatma Gandhi.

In rural areas, one could ask for work for 365 days. Workers could work in their own village, in their own land. To change this, the Modi government has implemented the VB-G RAM G Act. This is not Dasharatha Ram, Sita Ram or Kaushal Ram. This is Nathuram who killed Mahatma Gandhi. They attacked him saying that Gandhi is being killed for the first time.

Now the central government will specify such places as work through a notification. Work should be done there. Now the states have to bear 40% of the cost. The state government will have to give 2500 crore rupees. That is why NREGA has formed the Bachao Andolan. This should be transformed into a people's movement, he said.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that BJP killed Gandhiji in the past. Now they have killed his name too. In the future, they will remove even what is on the notes. BJP has lost the very thing that Gandhiji's name is mentioned in. There should be a struggle in all taluks. We will put observers where MLAs were. The program given by AICC should be done. There is no malice in this. We will not do it, we will tear them apart. We have moved forward with the change of the new district president. A new team is coming from outside for this. AICC programme should be done. A special session should be called for this, he said.

We will discuss legal issues. We should hold a sit-in in all the constituencies within 10 days. We should compulsorily hold a padayatra. We should submit a request to the taluk office. There is no compromise in this program. I will come to five or six places myself. I will come to Shikaripura myself. What a challenge they have given. I will walk five or six kilometres there myself. We are going to hold a programme on the NREGA issue on February 13, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said.

School anniversary celebration at Saint Flowers English School

BENGALURU

The 2025 school anniversary was celebrated at the auditorium of Saint Flowers English School in Chandra Layout, Vijayanagar.

Inaugurating the programme, Founder President Dr GR Krishnappa said that in today's era, the responsibility of parents to educate their children is important. One should not expect a big change in life all at once. He spoke about parents and children that immense improvement can be achieved through small changes every day.

MLA M Krishnappa said, I have great confidence in this school. It gains rank every year. It is gratifying that poor children are being given good education. Defeat is not final.

That is just a lesson on the path to victory. Don't lose heart when you face obstacles on the way to your goal. The citizens and students of this area should live their lives understanding that the darker the darkness, the closer the sunrise is, he said.

Managing Director Darshan Krishna said that defeats and challenges are not the end of life. They are only milestones that test your inner strength. If every step you take is filled with confidence, you can create a paradise of success in life like the next world. He told the students. Principals, teachers, parents, and students were present on this occasion. Later, the children entertained the audience by dancing in costumes.

Case booked over illegal Yash birthday banners

BENGALURU

A case was registered against a few individuals for installing large banners and buntings bearing the portrait of actor Yash on public property. According to a complaint filed by Pujarappa, Assistant Engineer, GBA, Vasanthnagar sub-division, the incident came to light after he received a phone call from the GBA Chief Commissioner. The Commissioner informed him that he saw the banners while travelling from Basaveshwara Circle to Windsor Manor Circle. Pujarappa, along with the Assistant Executive Engineer, found that GS Creation and Venu Group installed buntings and banners featuring Yash on the wall of Golf Club. The banners were put up for the actor's birthday celebrations. The complaint said the banners were installed without obtaining permission from any competent authority or the civic body, thus violating norms governing the use of public spaces. Based on the complaint, High Grounds police registered a case under Karnataka Open Place Disfigurement Act.

Security guard smashes puppy to death, CCTV footage sparks outrage

BENGALURU

A disturbing case of extreme animal cruelty surfaced in JP Nagar, where a young puppy was assaulted and killed, triggering outrage among residents and animal welfare volunteers. CCTV footage purportedly shows a man smashing the puppy against a wall before pinning it to the ground. A complaint has been lodged with Puttenahalli police by South Bengaluru Care. Police are on the lookout for the accused, identified as Nepal Kiran. According to animal welfare volunteers, the incident came to light after a local dog feeder shared videos on a WhatsApp group. The feeder regularly cared for a litter of eight puppies in the area. While the body of one puppy was recovered, the remaining puppies are missing. The accused, who worked as a security guard at a restaurant in JP Nagar and stayed at his brother's rented accommodation, is reportedly absconding following the incident.

Namma Metro adds 7th train, cuts Yellow Line wait to 10 mins

BENGALURU

Metro services on Yellow Line will now run every 10 minutes during peak hours, with Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) announcing the induction of its seventh train into passenger service from Jan 15.The improved frequency will apply from Monday to Saturday, cutting the existing peak-hour train frequency from 13 minutes to 10 minutes, a move expected to significantly ease rush-hour crowding. On Sundays, peak-hour services will also see a marginal improvement, with train frequency increasing from once every 15 minutes to every 14 minutes. BMRCL said there will be no change in the first and last train timings from the terminal stations at RV Road and Bommasandra on any day.

In a move towards digital ticketing, BBMRCL announced the launch of mobile-based QR code unlimited travel passes for 1, 3, and 5 days, effective January 15. These new passes, available through the official Namma Metro app, eliminate the Rs 50 refundable security deposit previously required for contactless smart cards. Commuters will be able to scan the QR code on their mobile phones at the automatic fare collection gates for both entry and exit. The cost for a one-day mobile QR pass is Rs 250, while the three-day and five-day passes are priced at Rs 550 and Rs 850, respectively. BMRCL stated that this initiative will help reduce queues and enhance commuter convenience.

BU faculty body objects to syndicate members on inspection panel

BENGALURU

The faculty of Bangalore University have objected to the appointment of syndicate and academic council members as chairpersons and members of the local inspection committee. The committees are in charge of inspecting affiliated colleges for quality, infrastructure, faculty, and compliance with norms before granting or renewing affiliations. "The local inspection committee is an academic and statutory body, entrusted with responsibilities such as academic scrutiny, evaluation of colleges/departments, assessment of faculty strength, curriculum relevance, laboratory facilities, research environment, and compliance with UGC and regulatory norms. Such responsibilities demand deep academic expertise, subject knowledge, and long teaching and research experience, which are inherently the domain of senior faculty members, said the Bengaluru University SC/ST Teachers' Association.

Min Urges Millet Demos, Seminars Before Agri Fair

BENGALURU

Agriculture Minister N. Chaluvarayaswamy has instructed officials to ensure that the International Trade Fair on Post-Harvest Agriculture–2026, scheduled to be held from February 6 to 8 at Palace Grounds in the city, is organized meticulously without any lapses.

The minister gave several suggestions while presiding over a preparatory meeting for the International Millet Fair held today at his office in Vidhana Soudha.

He pointed out that the Chief Minister, several Union Ministers, and State Ministers will participate in the inauguration and valedictory ceremonies, and stressed that special attention should be paid to protocol so that no shortcomings occur.

Stating that this year's fair should be special, the minister directed officials to confer the Krishi Pandit Award on 121 farmers.

BOON FOR SITE SEEKERS

High Court upholds BDA land acquisition for Banashankari VI Stage

BENGALURU

The High Court has upheld the Bangalore Development Authority's (BDA) acquisition of land for the extension of Banashankari VI Stage by linking the existing VI Stage Layout through Kanakapura Road. A division bench, comprising Justice DK Singh and Justice Tara Vitasta Ganju, dismissed the appeals filed by K Gangamma and others against a single bench order that dismissed their petitions challenging the acquisition of 75 guntas in Gubbalala village. The land was first notified on November 17, 2002, and the final notification was issued on Sep 9, 2003.The appellants claimed they were not given the same benefit as landowners of 657 acres and 15 guntas whose land parcels were left out of acquisition proceedings on payment of betterment charges. They also claimed that since the scheme was not implemented within the scheduled five years, it had to be treated as lapsed and their land had to be resumed. A single bench dismissed their petitions on April 8, 2024, after which they appealed before a division bench, raising the same

contentions. The division bench stated that the contention of the appellants that they were denied a fair opportunity to present objections was factually incorrect, as public hearings were conducted, their objections were considered, and necessary modifications were made.

The BDA Act does not mandate personal or oral hearings beyond the consideration of written objections, the bench noted, referring to a similar stand taken by the high court in the D Hemachandra Sagar case. It held that as long as a development scheme was prepared with broad compliance to Section 16 of the BDA Act, procedural sufficiency was maintained. The bench also noted that the single bench took note of the fact that the state govt granted approval for issuing the final notification in respect of 750 acres of land only, and that the original scheme stood modified. Out of the 750 acres notified, the BDA took possession of 580 acres and 18 guntas, which was handed over for the formation of layouts and carving 5,991 sites, of which 4,983 sites were allotted, indicating substantial implementation of the scheme. The division bench said the petitioners' submission that the scheme lapsed under Section 27 of the BDA Act did not find favour.

The acquisition process was lawful, fair, and necessary for urban planning. The statutory process under the BDA Act-1976 was rigorously followed, and all procedural safeguards were adhered to. The deletion of lands was based on rational considerations, and the public interest in urban expansion outweighs the individual interests of the appellants. Given that the acquisition already resulted in significant urban development, any interference at this stage would cause irreparable harm to public planning and infrastructure development. Accordingly, we are of the view that the BDA's acquisition is legally sound, and the appellants' claims require dismissal in the interest of justice, equity, and public welfare, the division bench observed, while dismissing the writ appeals filed by the landowners.

QUICK READ

Kumari Afsheen Selected for South India Science Exhibition

Dharwad

Kumari Afsheen M. Rahut, a Class 9 student of Presentation Girls' High School in Dharwad, has been chosen for the South India Zonal Science Exhibition. She earned this honor by giving the best performance at the State Level Science Exhibition in Royapur. Afsheen presented a model called "Advanced Sensor Lights." The zonal exhibition will be held at Gurudyam International School, Hyderabad, Telangana, from January 19 to 23. The school principal, teachers, and staff warmly congratulated her for this outstanding achievement.

Street Plays Promote Health Awareness Effectively: Gadag

Hubballi

Dr. Rajendra S. Gadag, Taluk Health Education Officer, said street plays help communities learn about health programs and their benefits. He spoke during the launch of folk street plays at Ayushman Health Mandir, Adavi Somapur. The plays focused on Ayushman Bharat, maternal and child health, adolescent health, nutrition, HIV, anemia, and epidemic prevention. Mrs. Neelamma Angadi, Government High School headmistress, praised the initiative, while folk artist Veeranna Angadi's team performed two plays and health songs. Local officials, teachers, students, ASHA workers, and residents attended the informative program.

Hubballi Hospital Saves Woman from Rare Disease

Hubballi

Chittagong Hospital in Hubballi has earned a reputation for saving lives of poor patients. Recently, doctors performed a rare five-hour surgery to save a woman from Belgaum suffering from an inflammatory myofibroblastic tumor of the urinary bladder—a condition reported only ten times worldwide. While private hospitals quoted two lakh rupees, the family received treatment at Chittagong Hospital. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Sri Dharam Depp confirmed the surgery was successful, giving the woman a new lease on life.

CID Struggles to Find Source of Leaked Video

Hubballi CID faces challenges investigating leaked video of BJP worker, leaving officers confused and frustrated

HUBBALLI

The investigation into a leaked video involving BJP worker Sujata Hamdi has left CID officials in Hubballi struggling to make progress. The Keshwapur police first registered an FIR (CR No. 05/26) under the IT Act to identify the source of the leak. The case was then handed over to the government's CID for further investigation.

Following government orders, three CID teams in Hubballi began examining six related FIRs. While 90% of work on five of the FIRs has been completed, the specific video leak case remains unresolved. In the last four days, the CID has not found any clear leads, leaving officers frustrated and unable to move forward. A dedicated team has been stationed at the Cyber Crime Police Station to trace the source of the video, which has circulated widely on social media. Despite extensive efforts, the origin of the video showing Sujata Hamdi remains unknown.

Authorities continue to emphasize that the investigation must follow proper procedures, ensuring accountability while respecting privacy. The CID's struggle highlights the challenges law enforcement faces when dealing with digital evidence and viral content. Meanwhile, the public awaits answers as officials work to uncover who leaked the sensitive footage.

This ongoing case has kept both the police and the community on edge, demonstrating the difficulties of solving cyber-related crimes in Hubballi.

Dharwad Court Considers POCSO Case Against Kidnapper

DHARWAD

Dharwad police seek court approval to register POCSO case after two girls were kidnapped in Kamalapur, ensuring strict action under child protection laws. (January 14, 2026).

The kidnapping case of two girls in the Dharwad Sub-Nagar police station area has taken a serious turn. Abdul Karim Mestri has been accused of abducting the girls from Kamalapur, prompting police action under stricter laws.

After recording the statement of one of the abducted girls, the Dharwad police have decided to pursue the case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The girl's statement provided key details about the incident, enabling authorities to strengthen the charges against the accused.

Police have now filed an application with the Dharwad District Court seeking permission to include the POCSO case within the original FIR for kidnapping. This step ensures that the accused faces severe legal consequences, and it allows authorities to follow all procedures under child protection laws.

Officials emphasized that child safety is a top priority, and the legal process will continue carefully to ensure justice for the victims. Investigators are also working to gather more evidence and information to support the POCSO case.

This development highlights the importance of timely action by law enforcement and the courts in handling cases involving minors. Authorities are urging parents and the public to remain vigilant while the investigation proceeds. Once the court grants permission, formal registration of the POCSO case will be completed, allowing stronger measures against Abdul Karim Mestri.

Kundagola: Huge Road Depression Causes Trouble for Motorists

KUNDAGOLA

A large depression has appeared in the middle of the district main road in Kundagola, causing concern for motorists and commuters. The damaged section, located on the road connecting the district center to Bihar village, has made travel risky for vehicles. Drivers have reported difficulties navigating the deep depression, especially during rainy conditions or at night.

The government has allocated Rs 20 lakh for maintenance of the district main road for the financial year 2025–26, and officials have now identified this depression as a priority for repair. Until the repair work is completed, local authorities have taken temporary measures to prevent accidents. Warning signs have been placed, and motorists are being advised to slow down and carefully navigate the affected section.

Residents and frequent travelers have expressed their concerns, urging the Public Works Department to take immediate action. "This depression is dangerous and could lead to accidents if not repaired soon," said a local commuter. Temporary markers, including reflective materials and warning signs, have been set up, but drivers are still urged to remain cautious.

Authorities have assured that the repair work will begin soon, and the ravine will be properly filled and leveled to restore safe travel. The repair is expected to improve road safety and reduce traffic hazards.

Heartbreaking Last Rites of Nepali Man

DHARWAD

The final rites of Bibek M. Bhat (40), a Nepali man who tragically died due to asphyxiation in his Dharwad home, were conducted in the city on Wednesday. Bibek had been living in Nirmala Nagar, KMF Himbhaga, where he shared a house provided by local hotel owners along with six other Nepali workers employed at Chings Chowk Hotel.

The tragic incident occurred after the men had cooked and eaten chicken barbecue at home on Friday night. Bibek accidentally left the stove on while sleeping, which led to a fire that engulfed the house. Eight Nepali residents, including Bibek, lost their lives in the blaze.

Since it was not possible to take Bibek's body back to Nepal, his family arranged for his last rites to be performed in Dharwad. Bibek's uncle, Bigna, took responsibility for carrying out the funeral rituals, ensuring his brother received proper respect according to tradition. The incident has left the local Nepali community and residents of Dharwad deeply saddened. Authorities and neighbors have expressed their grief over the tragic loss of life caused by the accident. This heartbreaking event serves as a reminder of the importance of fire safety and vigilance, especially in shared living spaces. The community has come together to mourn the victims and support the families affected by the tragedy.

Dharwad Women Celebrate Makara Sankranti

DHARWAD

Women in Dharwad celebrated Makar Sankranti, also known as the Harvest Festival, with great enthusiasm and joy. This festival marks the day when the sun changes its path, and it is a time of happiness and thanksgiving for the harvest.

In Sadhankeri Park, members of the Folklore Research Center of Dharwad gathered to mark the occasion. They came from different homes, bringing with them a variety of traditional dishes. The menu included Sajji Rotti, Ragi Rotti, Sesame-coated Rotti, Madali, Yellekai Palle,

Red Chutney, Shengaholige, Mosaranna, Puli Yogare, and Chitranna. The women offered prayers to Mother Ganga and shared these delicacies among themselves, celebrating the bounty of the harvest.

The women adorned themselves in traditional attire, wearing Ilakal sarees, bangles, nattu, boramala, bendole, and dabu. They danced to folk songs, sang Sankranti melodies, and shared sesame and jaggery, which are symbolic of the festival. The joy and energy in the park reflected the true spirit of Makar Sankranti.

In recent times, festival celebrations have been decreasing, but events like this help preserve culture and traditions. The Folklore Research Center has been actively keeping these customs alive by celebrating festivals with traditional food, clothing, and music every year. Through such gatherings, younger generations also get to learn and enjoy the cultural heritage of Karnataka.

The celebration was a perfect mix of devotion, fun, and tradition, bringing the community together and spreading happiness among women in Dharwad.

MP Sports Festival to Be On Held January 16–17

DHARWAD

The Dharwad MP Sports Festival 2025–26, organized under the leadership of Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, will take place on January 16 and 17 at Garaki-Garga village in Dharwad taluka. Minister of State for Urban Development, Amrit Desai, announced this at a press conference in Dharwad on Tuesday, adding that all arrangements for the festival, including the grand opening ceremony, have been completed.

The festival is being organized by the Dharwad Rural Vidhan Sabha to recognize and encourage sports talent at the grassroots level. It aims to give young athletes, especially from rural areas, an opportunity to showcase their skills and gain recognition.

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi will preside over the event. Several dignitaries will also attend, including Vidhan Parishad Sabha Chairman Basavaraj Jahoraati, former ministers Amrita Desai and Seema Masuti, BJP Grameen Mandal President Ningappa Sutagati, and other local leaders. The event will feature competitions across multiple sports, with prizes and recognition for outstanding performers.

The Central Government's Parliament Sports Festival program has been introduced across all Lok Sabha constituencies to promote

sports culture, physical fitness, and leadership skills among youth. Similarly, this festival in Dharwad is expected to inspire rural youth, particularly young women, to actively participate in sports and bring their talent into the spotlight.

Speaking at the press meet, former MLA Amrita Desai highlighted that the festival provides an important platform for rural athletes and hopes that the event will see a large participation of young women from villages. Other prominent attendees included BJP leaders Sangana Gowda, Ramana Gowda, Shankar Mugada, Nagappa Ganage, Shashimoul Kulkarni, and several local representatives.

Dharwad Murder Accused Dies by Hanging In Jail

DHARWAD

A shocking incident occurred at Dharwad Central Jail on Wednesday when an inmate committed suicide. The deceased has been identified as Eshwarappa Pujara, 46, from Lakshmeshwara in Gadag district. He was in custody in connection with the murder of his wife. According to jail officials, Eshwarappa was found hanging in one of the buildings where inmates are assigned work. The discovery was made during routine checks, and the jail authorities immediately informed the suburban police station, which has jurisdiction over the area.

Police arrived at the scene and confirmed the death. The jail administration has begun an internal inquiry to determine how the incident happened and whether proper monitoring was in place. Authorities have stated that a post-mortem examination will be conducted to confirm the cause of death and to support the ongoing investigation.

The tragic incident has left the local community in shock. Relatives and neighbors expressed their grief over the unexpected death of the accused. Jail authorities have emphasized the importance of stricter supervision and proper mental health support for inmates, especially those facing serious charges.

Dharwad Mangoes Promise Rich Harvest This Year

DHARWAD

Mango, often called the king of fruits, has been cultivated extensively in Dharwad over the past four to five years. This year, mango trees in the district are in full bloom, bringing renewed hope to local farmers. Dharwad is famous for its mango production, and the fruit is highly sought after both within and outside the region.

In recent years, mango growers have faced several challenges. Last year, though the trees were full of flowers, unfavorable weather prevented fruit development. Some years saw unexpected snowfall, while others experienced damage due to unseasonal rains. In addition, farmers often struggled to get the price they expected for their produce. However, this year, conditions have been favorable, and around 90 percent of the flowering is turning into potential fruit. Mangoes are grown on approximately 13,000 hectares of land in Dharwad district.

Maintenance Woes Plague Luxury Intercity Buses Between Twin Cities

HUBBALLI

The luxury intercity buses running between Hubballi and Dharwad, launched to provide fast and comfortable travel, are now facing serious maintenance issues. Many of these high-cost buses, purchased for crores of rupees, are breaking down frequently on the route, causing trouble for passengers and creating headaches for the North-West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC).

The buses were introduced to reduce travel time and provide premium service, running between Hubballi Railway Station and the new Dharwad bus station on a dedicated 22.5 km road. Launched in 2018 at a cost of around ₹1,000 crore, the fleet once included 100 buses operating daily, making it one of South India's first such projects.

However, today, frequent breakdowns are reported due to clutch plate failures, gearbox problems, engine overheating, and sensor issues. The lack of spare parts has worsened the situation. Only 60 to 70 buses run daily now, far below the intended number.

SANKRANTI-CELEBRATION-2026

Sai PU College Students Celebrate Vibrant Sankranti

DHARWAD

Makar Sankranti, marking the sun's northward journey, was celebrated with joy and tradition across Karnataka. At Sai Pre-University College in Dharwad, students organized a lively event showcasing cultural rituals and festive spirit.

The celebrations began in the college auditorium with traditional prayers. Following this, students exchanged sesame seeds (ellu), symbolizing goodwill, sharing, and prosperity. Male students wore simple white attire, while female students shone in colorful sarees, adding elegance to the occasion. Teachers and staff also participated, strengthening the sense of community.

Known as the Suggi festival, Sankranti is Karnataka's first harvest festival of the year. The college event aimed to teach students about its significance while preserving traditional customs. The campus was decorated with bright rangoli patterns, floral arrangements, and decorative torans, creating a vibrant village-like setting.

Students took part enthusiastically, sharing sweets, performing traditional songs, and dancing to folk music, reflecting the festive energy of rural celebrations. Earlier, hundreds gathered in the college courtyard to enjoy these performances, immersing themselves in Karnataka's rich cultural heritage.

The event went beyond celebration; it provided a learning experience, reminding students of their roots and encouraging respect for customs. The Sankranti festival at Sai PU College showcased community bonding, cultural pride, and the joy of welcoming a new year through shared rituals, fun, and happiness.

QUICK READ

Applications Open for ST Women Housing

Gadag

Under the Chief Minister's Amrita Nagarotthana Scheme Phase 04, applications are invited for building pucca houses for Scheduled Tribe women below the poverty line in Shirahatti Town Panchayat. Eligible women with kachcha houses or vacant plots can apply. Forms are available at the Town Panchayat office and must be submitted with documents like voter ID, BPL card, Aadhaar, bank passbook, caste/income certificate, and four passport photos. Last date for submission is January 19. For details, contact the Shirahatti Town Panchayat office.

Ensure Students Receive Nutritious Hot Meals Daily

Dharwad, January 14, 2026: Dr. Eshwar Ullagaddi urges school officials to provide students healthy, hygienic hot meals including eggs regularly

DHARWAD

Dr. Eshwar Ullagaddi, Additional Commissioner of the Kittur Karnataka Educational Zone, has instructed Akshara Dasoha officers to ensure that all government and aided primary and secondary school students receive nutritious hot meals, including eggs. He gave these directions during a progress review meeting at the Government Teachers' Training College on Tuesday, regarding the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Abhiyan scheme in nine districts.

Dr. Ullagaddi emphasized that officials must personally visit schools and taste the meals to check quality. He also highlighted the importance of maintaining strict

ಶಾಲಾ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಇಲಾಖೆ,ಆಯುಕ್ತರ ಕಚೇರಿ–ಧಾರವಾಡ

ಪ್ರಧಾನ ಮಂತ್ರಿ ಪೋಷಣ ಶಕ್ತಿ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣ ಅಭಿಯಾನ ಯೋಜನೆ

cleanliness in meal preparation, food storage, and distribution, ensuring there is no contamination. Students should also be encouraged to wash their hands thoroughly before eating, spreading this message during daily prayer time.

Regarding egg distribution, he reminded officials that boiled eggs are given six days a week, and the financial management of the special grant covering these costs must be properly monitored as per rules.

The meeting was attended by Additional Commissioner's Office Director Ishwar Nayak, Joint Director Jayashree Karekar, Deputy Director Girish Padaki, and District and Taluk-level Education Officers from Vijaypur, Bagalkot, Belgaum, Uttara Kannada, Dharwad, Haveri, Gadag, Sirsi, and Chikkodi educational districts.

Dr. Ullagaddi concluded by stressing that the health of students must never be compromised, and all stakeholders should actively ensure the meals improve children's nutrition and overall well-being.

Students Embrace Rural Traditions at Sankranti Celebration

Mayur Global School students celebrated Makar Sankranti with village-style decorations, traditional rituals, Pongal preparation, and cultural activities, learning the festival's significance in an engaging, hands-on way.

DAVANGERE

Davangere's Mayur Global School recently celebrated Makar Sankranti in a unique way, recreating a rural village atmosphere on campus. Students got a chance to experience traditional village life and enjoy the festival's cultural essence.

The celebration began with a cow-worship (Gopuja) ceremony, a symbolic gesture for prosperity and respect toward agriculture. Students dressed in vibrant, traditional attire, and actively participated in all the events. The campus was decorated with colorful rangoli, floral torans, and small heaps of harvested grains, giving the space an authentic village charm.

Students engaged in hands-on learning about rural traditions. They pounded grains with pestles, carried harvest baskets, and observed typical household chores from village life. They also prepared traditional dishes such as Pongal and rotis, shared sesame-jaggery (ellu-bella), and performed small rituals to honor the harvest. These activities helped students understand Sankranti's cultural and agricultural importance.

Teachers highlighted that experiential learning allows children to connect deeply with traditions, nature, and the role of farming in everyday life. The event went beyond the classroom, encouraging students to explore, enjoy, and celebrate their heritage with enthusiasm.

Parents and visitors appreciated the school's initiative, noting the joy and excitement visible on the students' faces. The celebration recreated the warmth and simplicity of village life while teaching the significance of Sankranti, making it both educational and memorable.

Overall, Mayur Global School's Sankranti festivities inspired students to value cultural roots, agriculture, and traditional practices, all while enjoying the festive spirit with energy and excitement.

Teacher and SDMC Head Clash Inside Haveri School

HAVERI

A shocking incident at a government primary school in Hangal town of Haveri district has sparked public outrage. An ugly fight broke out between a guest teacher and the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) president within the school premises. The incident, which was caught on video, has gone viral on social media, leading to widespread criticism.

According to sources, the clash took place at the MLA's Government Model Primary School. The guest teacher, identified as Ganter, and the SDMC president, Satish Bosale, reportedly got into a heated argument over a minor personal issue. What began as a verbal exchange soon turned violent, with both men grabbing each other's shirts and hitting one another like rowdies, right inside the school campus.

There are also allegations that the SDMC president used abusive language against the teacher during the argument. The situation quickly went out of control, shocking students, parents, and staff present at the school. Many parents have expressed anger and disappointment, saying that such behavior from people responsible for children's education is unacceptable.

The incident has raised serious questions about discipline and responsibility within educational institutions. Teachers and SDMC members are expected to set a good example for students, but this fight has damaged the school's image and shaken public trust.

Adding to the concern, reports have highlighted poor basic facilities at the school. Students are facing problems due to damaged toilets, lack of clean drinking water, and other infrastructure issues. Parents have demanded that authorities focus on improving school facilities and maintaining discipline.

Education department officials are expected to look into the incident and take appropriate action. The viral video has increased pressure on authorities to ensure such incidents do not repeat in schools.

Doctor Arrested After Ganja Found at Belagavi Home

BELAGAVI

Malamaruti police in Belagavi have arrested a doctor after seizing ganja that was illegally stored at his residence. The accused was working at a private hospital in the city at the time of the incident. The arrest followed a raid conducted based on specific and reliable information received by the police.

According to police sources, the Malamaruti police station team carried out the operation on Saturday. During the search of the doctor's house, officers found 134 grams of ganja hidden inside the bedroom. The seized substance was taken into custody as evidence.

The arrested doctor has been identified as Rahul Vithal Banti. He was employed as a medical practitioner in a private hospital in Belagavi. Police sources said there were serious allegations that the accused was consuming ganja and examining patients while under its influence. Based on these preliminary inputs, the police decided to verify the information and conduct the raid. Following the seizure, the police took Rahul Vithal Banti into custody and registered a case against him at the Malamaruti police station. Further investigation is currently underway to find out the source of the ganja and whether the accused was involved in any illegal drug network.

Police officials stated that strict action will be taken as per the law, especially since the accused held a responsible position as a doctor. They also said that such actions endanger public safety and trust in the medical profession.

The police have urged the public to report any information related to illegal drug activities. They added that regular checks and raids will continue across the city to curb drug-related offences and ensure safety for residents.

Crop Survey Begins Through Farmers Survey App

GADAG

The state government has launched the "Rabi Farmers Crop Survey–25" mobile application to collect details of crops grown during the current rabi season in Gadag district. The survey has received a good response from farmers in its early days. From January 2 to January 12, farmers have already completed surveys for 1,08,508 land parcels, which is about 31 percent of the total target. During the 2024–25 rabi season, the government had set a target to conduct crop surveys in 3.16 lakh land parcels across the district. Surveys were successfully completed in 3.15 lakh parcels, achieving 99.68 percent progress. Encouraged by this success, the government has continued the initiative for the 2025–26 rabi season.

Minister Praises Honesty of Lakkundi Boy Prajwal

GADAG

Minister H.K. Patil praised the honesty of 14-year-old Prajwal Ritti, calling his action truly inspiring, after a hidden treasure was found in the historic village of Lakkundi. Gold ornaments weighing 466 grams and a copper vessel weighing 634 grams were discovered, and the district administration has taken custody of the items.

Speaking at a press conference held on Tuesday at the Lakshminarayana Temple in Lakkundi, Minister Patil said that while the treasure itself is valuable, the boy's honesty is even greater. He said Prajwal's decision to hand over the found items to the authorities sets a rare and admirable example.

The minister informed that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has also taken note of the incident. The Chief Minister appreciated the boy's honesty and said that returning such valuable items to the government shows strong moral values. Minister Patil added that Prajwal's act has brought pride not only to his family but also to the entire village.

Lakkundi is a place with rich history, once ruled by the Rashtrakutas and Chalukyas. The minister said that such discoveries are not uncommon in ancient areas, and the state government is making continuous efforts to declare Lakkundi as a World Heritage Site.

After finding the copper vessel, Prajwal safely kept it locked in a temple room. He later discussed the matter with village elders and panchayat members before handing over the items to the district administration. This, the minister said, shows great maturity.

The government will decide where the treasure should be kept as per law. Minister Patil assured that full support and suitable honor will be given to Prajwal's family, and a decision will be taken in the upcoming cabinet meeting.

Farmer Declared Dead by Mistake, Accountant Suspended

BELGAUM

In a shocking administrative error, a farmer in Suthagatti village, Belgaum, was officially recorded as dead while he was very much alive. The incident came to light when the farmer, Eerappa Nagappa Abbai, applied for a government subsidy for drip irrigation in July 2025 and discovered the mistake in official records.

According to reports, the confusion began on July 8, 2021, when Eerappa submitted a request for a family member's death certificate. The village accountant, Neela Muragoda, mistakenly entered that Eerappa himself had died. This error went unnoticed for five years, causing the farmer to miss out on government schemes and benefits. The death certificate was only handed to him five months ago.

Following a suo motu complaint by Lokayukta officials against four local officers for negligence and document forgery, Belgaum District Collector Mohammed Roshan ordered the suspension of the village accountant on January 12, 2026. Other officials involved in the case include Muragoda Circle Revenue Inspector R.S. Patil, Savadatti Tahsildar Mallikarjuna Heggan, and Bailahongala Sub-Divisional Officer Praveen Jain, with investigations ongoing.

District Collector Roshan stated, "The village accountant has been suspended for dereliction of duty. Further action, including disciplinary measures, will be taken according to the law."

Eerappa expressed frustration over the mistake, saying it has caused him significant delays and financial loss, including missing a Rs. 3 lakh subsidy for drip irrigation, and he continues to struggle to correct the official records

KARWAR SUICIDE ALLEGATIONS

Serious Allegations Bring New Turn to Karwar Suicide Case

KARWAR

The suicide case of a young woman in Karwar has taken a disturbing new turn after her mother made strong allegations against the son of a JD(S) leader. The case, which earlier focused on harassment, has now drawn wider attention due to claims of sexual assault and severe mental pressure.

The victim's mother, Christoda D'Souza, alleged that her daughter was repeatedly harassed and sexually assaulted by the accused. She said her daughter was unable to bear the physical and emotional suffering, which ultimately pushed her to take her own life. According to the mother, the young woman could not share the incident with her family due to fear, shame, and trauma.

Christoda D'Souza said the shocking details came to light just before the funeral. As per tradition, the family was bathing the body when they noticed injury marks on several parts of her daughter's body. She claimed there were bite marks across the body, including on private areas. She also alleged that there was heavy bleeding from the private parts, which raised serious suspicion of sexual assault.

The grieving mother said her daughter suffered in silence and chose suicide as she felt trapped and helpless. She demanded a fair, transparent, and speedy investigation so that the truth comes out and justice is served.

Seeking justice, Christoda D'Souza has written letters to the Chief Minister, the Home Minister, the Superintendent of Police, and the Deputy Commissioner. She has demanded the immediate arrest of the accused.

Meanwhile, anger is growing among residents of Kadra village. Locals have announced that if the accused is not arrested soon, they will stage a protest in front of the Karwar Deputy Commissioner's office. The case has increased pressure on authorities to act without delay and ensure justice, regardless of political influence.

Shri Shivayogi Siddarameshwar Jayanti Observed in Gadag

GADAG

Shri Shivayogi Siddarameshwar Jayanti was observed in a simple and dignified manner on Wednesday at the auditorium of the Gadag District Administration Building. District Collector C.N. Sridhar paid floral tribute to the portrait of Shri Shivayogi Siddarameshwar and offered prayers, remembering his teachings and values.

The programme was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner Dr. Duragesh K. R., Tahsildar Srinivas Murthy Kulkarni, District Backward Classes Welfare Officer M.A. Thubaramatti, and several other officials, community leaders, elders, and well-wishers.

Speakers highlighted the importance of Shri Shivayogi Siddarameshwar's message of peace, equality, and social harmony. The event was conducted in a calm and respectful atmosphere, reflecting the simplicity and spiritual spirit associated with the saint.

Cong chair fight stalls K'taka development: Vijayendra

Vijayendra announced BJP's January 17 Ballari protest highlighting corruption, law, drugs, farmer struggles, with senior leaders participating

CHITRADURGA

Development in Karnataka has come to a standstill due to internal conflicts among Congress leaders, said BJP State President and MLA B.Y. Vijayendra at a press conference on Wednesday.

Vijayendra accused the state government of neglecting important issues as leaders focus on retaining or seizing the chief minister's chair. "During the German Chancellor's visit to Karnataka, the Chief Minister should have focused on attracting investment. Instead, he got involved in Delhi politics and internal squabbles. One leader fears losing the chair, while another is eager to become CM. The state's progress has suffered because of this fight," he said.

He announced that the BJP will hold a massive protest in Ballari on January 17 to highlight government failures. The demonstration will focus on corruption, law and order issues, drug problems, and the struggles of farmers. Senior party leaders including Janardhana Reddy and Sriramulu are expected to participate. Vijayendra added that discussions with the party high command are complete, and the final protest plan will be announced soon.

Vijayendra also highlighted BJP initiatives aimed at rural development, including the VB-G RAM G scheme, designed to curb corruption in MNREGA and directly support asset creation in villages. He emphasized that wage laborers will receive leave to support agricultural activities, benefiting farmers during peak seasons. "While the Congress spreads false claims about this scheme, BJP workers will engage with villagers to explain its benefits," he said. The BJP leader expressed concern over the state's overall stagnation due to political conflicts and called on the government to focus on real issues rather than personal ambitions.

He concluded by urging people to participate in the Bellary protest to raise their voices for development and hold leaders accountable for the state's decline.

Chitradurga farmers get fixed maize price scheme

CHITRADURGA

The district set a 2.17 lakh quintals maize purchase target; farmers must complete gate formalities, with a maximum Rs. 250 per quintal price difference

Farmers in Chitradurga district can now sell maize under the government's Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) for the 2025-26 monsoon season, with a fixed price of Rs. 2,150 per quintal, District Magistrate T. Venkatesh announced on Wednesday.

Registration for the scheme has begun at APMC purchase centers across the district, including Chitradurga, Challakere, Hiriyur, Holalkere, Hosadurga, Molakalmuru taluks, and Rampur. Farmers are advised to bring only F.A.Q.-grade maize to ensure quality standards are met.

The district administration has set a purchase target of 2.17 lakh quintals based on area production estimates. Farmers must bring maize to the E and F block gates and complete gate entry formalities. The government will pay a maximum price difference of Rs. 250 per quintal through direct bank transfer for up to 50 quintals per farmer, depending on the market rate.

If the market price is Rs. 1,900 or less, the full Rs. 250 difference will be paid. At Rs. 1,950, Rs. 200 per quintal will be credited. Farmers whose maize sells at Rs. 2,150 or higher will not receive additional support under this scheme.

To participate, farmers must register with their Fruit ID, Aadhaar card, and bank passbook. PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperative Societies) can also register and sell maize under the program. E-tendering will be available on designated market days, and farmers must follow gate entry procedures on the same day.

The scheme will continue until February 7, 2026. District Collector T. Venkatesh urged all eligible farmers to take advantage of this opportunity to secure fair prices for their maize.

Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamy Jayanti to be observed on January 18

RAMANAGARA

The Bidadi BGS Seva Samiti will organise the 81st Jayanti celebrations of Jagadguru Dr. Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji on January 18, with a series of religious and social service activities planned to mark the occasion.

Announcing this at a press conference held on Wednesday at the BGS Blind School on the outskirts of the town, BGS Seva Samiti president C. Umesh said the programme will commence with floral tributes to the statue of Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji near the BGS Circle in Bidadi. The celebrations will coincide with the 13th death anniversary of the revered seer, and a mega blood donation camp will be organised as part of the observance.

Devotees attending the event will be provided annadana (free meals), while devotional music will be rendered by Shivara Umesh and his team, adding a spiritual touch to the programme. Umesh said the Jayanti would be celebrated in a meaningful manner, reflecting the Swamiji's lifelong commitment to social service.

He highlighted that Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji was a visionary social reformer who transcended caste and religious barriers to serve society. Through initiatives in education and food security, the Swamiji empowered lakhs of students and became a revered spiritual figure across communities.

Addressing the gathering, Adi Chunchanagiri Ramanagara Branch Mutt pontiff Sri Annadaneshwaranatha Swamiji lauded the Bidadi BGS Seva Samiti for consistently organising the Jayanti and memorial celebrations with a focus on social welfare. He said that initiatives such as annadana and blood donation camps truly embodied the Swamiji's ideals and wished divine blessings upon the organisers.

BGS Seva Samiti general secretary B.M. Rajashekar, treasurer Shivalingayya, directors Shashikumar, Jagadish, Bhanu Prakash, Harish, Srinivas and others were present at the press conference.

Shivayogi Siddarameshwara celebrated for lifelong service

CHITRADURGA

The life and teachings of Shivayogi Shri Siddarameshwara were remembered and honored during the Jayanti program organized at the city's office hall on Wednesday, said Additional Deputy Commissioner B.T. Kumaraswamy.

Paying floral tributes to Siddarameshwara's portrait, Kumaraswamy highlighted the saint's dedication to "kayaking" – a term symbolizing selfless work – and social service. "Siddarameshwara believed that 'Kayak is Kailash' and devoted his life to helping society through public service and devotion," he said.

Siddarameshwara, a senior Sharan, worked tirelessly to improve farmers' lives by constructing lakes and embankments. He also used his vachanas to challenge societal injustices and superstitions, promoting equality and human values. Kumaraswamy said the principles taught by Siddarameshwara remain highly relevant today.

He emphasized that great personalities should not be confined to caste, and that Siddarameshwara, truly secular in outlook, valued literature, education, and the welfare of all. "He preached humanity as the greatest religion, and hard work as true devotion. He lived his teachings and built a society based on human values," Kumaraswamy added.

District Guarantee Scheme Authority President R. Shivanna Ganjigatte said Siddarameshwara's life is proof that selfless work is sacred. District Bhovi Sangha President T. Thippeswamy detailed that Siddarameshwara was born in the 12th century in a poor family in Mudhagi, Solapur, Maharashtra, and became a close devotee of Basavanna.

As part of the celebrations, Nunkesh and his team from Siddayankote, Molakalmuru Taluk, performed devotional songs. Several dignitaries attended, including Sub-Divisional Officer Venkatesh Naik, Taluk Panchayat Executive Officer Ravikumar, Dr. B.M. Gurunath of the Kannada and Culture Department, and leaders from the Bhovi Sangha and other community organizations.

Chitradurga student selected for Republic Day parade

CHITRADURGA

N. Harish, a second-year B.A. student at Chitradurga Government Arts College (Autonomous), has been chosen to represent Karnataka in the state-level Republic Day NSS unit parade. The event will take place from January 13 to 26 at the Youth Training Center, Bengaluru, organized by the National Service Scheme Cell under the Youth Empowerment and Sports Department. Harish was congratulated by the college Principal Dr. J. Kariappa Malige, NSS program officers Dr. V. Prasad and B.K. Basavaraj, along with faculty, staff, and students.

Surprise food safety raid hits Molakalmuru shops

MOLAKALMURU

Molakalmuru witnessed a sudden food safety inspection on Wednesday as officials checked various shops, hotels, restaurants, and health centers across the town. The surprise raid aimed to ensure that all food items met quality standards and that safety regulations were being followed.

Authorities, led by Dr. Girish and senior health officers, inspected the production, storage, and expiry dates of food items. Vendors were instructed to remove any expired or substandard products immediately. The officials also verified that all establishments held proper food safety certificates and official permits from the Panchayat.

During the inspection, officers emphasized the ban on plastics above 40 microns and reminded businesses not to sell any tobacco products. They also advised shopkeepers and restaurant owners to maintain cleanliness and ensure public areas were free from pollution. Notices about the prohibition of smoke and other harmful substances were required to be displayed clearly at each establishment.

Senior Health Officer Arogy Ila Kheya Kumar stated that non-compliance with these rules would result in fines and other legal actions. The team encouraged local businesses to prioritize public health while adhering to safety regulations.

Residents welcomed the initiative, noting that such inspections help maintain high standards of hygiene and protect the community from unsafe food. Officials promised that regular monitoring would continue to ensure compliance and safeguard public health in the region.

NAME CHANGE

I, **JOHN CALVIN BANDI**, resident of No 2, 80/3, Manjunatha Nilaya, 2nd Cross, Jayanthinagar Extension, Bengaluru-560043, have changed my Minor Son's name from **SHAYNE JOHN CALVIN BANDI** to **SHAYNE CALVIN BANDI**, vide affidavit dated: 14.01.2026, before Notary G. DAYANANDA, Bangalore

NAME CHANGE

I, **SUNITHA JOHN CALVIN BANDI**, W/o John Calvin Bandi, resident of No 2, 80/3, Manjunatha Nilaya, 2nd Cross, Jayanthinagar Extension, Bengaluru-560043, have changed my name to **SUNITHA SOLOMON NAGELLI**, vide affidavit dated: 14.01.2026, before Notary G. DAYANANDA, Bangalore.

NAME CHANGE

I, **JOHNCALVIN DEVABHUSHANAM BANDI**, S/o Devabushanam Bandi, resident of No 2, 80/3, Manjunatha Nilaya, 2nd Cross, Jayanthinagar Extension, Bengaluru-560043, have changed my name to **JOHN CALVIN BANDI**, vide affidavit dated: 14.01.2026, before Notary G. DAYANANDA, Bangalore.

NAME CHANGE

I, **JOHN CALVIN BANDI**, resident of No 2, 80/3, Manjunatha Nilaya, 2nd Cross, Jayanthinagar Extension, Bengaluru-560043, have changed my Minor Son's name from **SHAWN JOHN CALVIN BANDI** to **SHAWN CALVIN BANDI**, vide affidavit dated: 14.01.2026, before Notary G. DAYANANDA, Bangalore

NAME CHANGE

I, **MOHAMMED ISHAQ SHARIEF**, Resident of No.15/3, 2nd Main Road, Jagajeevanramnagar, Bengaluru-560018, have changed my name to **MOHAMMED ISHAQ SHARIFF**, Vide Affidavit Dated: 14.01.2026 before notary M. PRABHAKAR, Bengaluru.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, ASHA S W/O R KUMAR, R/O # 618, 13TH Cross B M Shree Nagar, Metagalli, Mysore, Karnataka - 570016, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as MANGALAMMA.

NAME CHANGE

I, **ZAFRULLA KHAN,** S/o Arif ulla Khan Resident of No.136, Dargajogihalli Dodballapur Bengaluru Rural 561203 have changed my name to **ZAFAR ULLA KHAN,** Vide Affidavit Dated: 14.01.2026 before notary R.BASAVARAJA Bengaluru.

NAME CHANGE

I, **AFSAR KHAN**, aged 74 years, S/o. Khadad Khan, permanent address Residing at No.42, 9th D Main Road, New Gurappana Palya, Bengaluru-560029, and at present resident at No.244, Masjid Main Road, Near Airtle Tower, Adigarakallahalli, Bidaraguppe, Anekal Bengaluru-562107, have changed my name **AFSAR KHAN** and Aadhar Card and Pan Card Same Name and where as is sale deed my name has mentioned as **APSAR** were if all records name is **AFSAR KHAN**, Vide Affidavit Dated: 13.01.2026 before notary V. RAJASHEKHARA, Bengaluru.

GULBARGA UNIVERSITY, KALABURAGI
Office of Registar, GUK,
Jnana Ganga : Kalaburagi – 585 106., Karnataka, India, Phone No. : 08472-263203 Fax 08472-263207, E-Mail regegug@rediffmail.com

No.GUK/EXAM-STORE/166C/ap/2025-26/1978 Date : 14.01.2026

SHORT TENDER NOTIFICATION THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT-IIND CALL

Name of the work: **Tender for printing & Supply of barcode Answer booklets** 2) Availability of Tender Document: **https://www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in**, 3) Estimate amount : 95,00,000/-, 4) EMD submission in online: 1.45,000/-, 5) Last date and time for submission of Tender: **10./02/2026 up to 11.30 am,** 6) Last date and time for submission of samples : **06.02.2026 up to 5.30 pm,** 7) Date and Time of opening of Technical bid: **12.02.2026 03.30 pm**, 8) Date and Time of opening of financial bid: **13.02.2026 03.30 pm** or after finalizing technical bids, 9) Place of supply : Examination Store Gulbarga University, Kalaburagi.

DIPR/Kalaburagi/977/KSMC&A/2025-26

Sd/- Registrar (Evaluation)
Gulbarga University, Kalaburagi

GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA
MINOR IRRIGATION & GROUND WATER DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
M.I & G.W.D.D. DIVISION, VIJAYAPUR

No.EE/MID/VJP/AE-4/4702/TND/2025-26/3851 **Date: 13.01.2026**

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION

The Executive Engineer, Minor Irrigation and Ground Water Development Department, Division Vijaypur invites work tenders through "E-Procurement" from eligible contractor on item rate Tender for following works as per KTPP Act-2000 and latest amendments.

4702 Major Works :- 1) Construction of Bridge Cum Barrage Across Local Nala Between Lingadalli-Handral Village and Construction of Checkdam Site-01 & Site-02 in Jambaldinni Village in Muddebihal Taluka of Vijayapura District, **Amount put to Tender Rs.795.72 Lakhs**, EMD **Rs.11,94,000-00, 2)**Construction of Bridge Cum Barrage Across Local Nala Near Galapuji Village and Between Alur-Hunkunte Road in Muddebihal Taluka of Vijayapura District, **Amount put to Tender Rs.799.70 Lakhs**, EMD **Rs.12,00,000-00, 3)** Construction of Bandhara(Site-1) across nala near Chabanur village in Talikoti Taluka of Vijayapur District, **Amount put to Tender Rs.185.81 Lakhs**, EMD **Rs.2,79,000-00, Tender Period for the above Sl.No.1 & 2 works are Eleven(11) Months including monsoon and Sl.No.3 work is Nine(9) Months including monsoon.**

Tender documents may be downloaded from Government of Karnataka E-Procurement website https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in/#/portal/portal-home under login for Contractors from **13.01.2026.** Tenders may be submitted on electronically in E-Procurement portal up to **17-30 hrs.** on **23.01.2026.** Interested contractors information regarding works may be obtained from this office or e-Procurement helpdesk (Ph.No.080-25501216 & 080-25501227) upto **17-30 hrs.** on **22.01.2026.** Pre-bid meeting will be held on **19.01.2026** for work costing above 1.00Crore in the office of the Executive Engineer, MI&GWDD Division, Vijaypur. Tenders shall be quoted without adding GST and other details can be seen in the tender documents.

ವಾಸಾಸಂಇ/ವಿಜಯಪುರ/616/ಕೆಎಸ್ಎಂಸಿಎ/2025–26

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
MI & GWDD Division, Vijayapur

TOWN PANCHAYAT OFFICE NALATAWAD

No.TPN/PWD/SFC/SPL/T.N/2025-26 Date:14.01.2026

E-Preocurement Tender Notification

The Chief Officer Town Panchayat Nalatawad has invited Item rate tender from eligible KPWD registered Contractors for the work detailed in the table below, taken under SFC Special Grant 2024-25. The tender is through e-procurement portal only as per KTPP -2000 in two cover system. For any further details please contact e-procurement portal (https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in) or Town Panchayat Nalatawad in Office hours. INDENT NO: **DMA/2025-26/BR/WORK_INDENT46883** 01. Last date for Submission of tender through e- portal : 27-01-2026 Up to 4-30 PM 02.Date of opening of the Technical bids :28-01-2026 @ 5.00PM 03.Date of opening of the Financial bids : 29-01-2026 @ 5.00PM 04. If any of above mentioned dates are declared as Govt. holidays, the next working day will be considered.

Sd/- Chief Officer Town Panchayat Nalatawad | **Sd/- Vice President Town Panchayat Nalatawad** | **Sd/- President Town Panchayat Nalatawad**

ವಾಸಾಸಂಇ/ವಿಜಯಪುರ/621/ಕೆಎಸ್ಎಂಸಿಎ/2025–26

VISVESVARAYA JALA NIGAM LTD.
(A Govt. of Karnataka Enterprises)
Office of the Executive Engineer,
Yettinahole Project Division, No. 4, Madhugiri,
Tumkur Dist - 572 132, Phone : 08137- 282112,
E-mail : eeyetmadhugiri4@gmail.com

No. : E.E./V.J.N.L./YHP/Div-No. 4/Madhugiri/NIT-10/2025-26
Date : 12-01-2026

TENDER NOTIFICATION

(Through K.P.P. Portal)

On Behalf of **Managing Director, Visvesvaraya Jala Nigama Limited, Bangalore the Executive Engineer, V.J.N.L., Yettinahole Project Division, No. 4, Madhugiri, Karnataka** invites Two Tender Document System from eligible Electrical Contractors for the Works, **Construction of Protection Wall to the Farmer Lands in SY. No. 56 and 54 of Kammanakote Village, Kasaba Hobli, Madhugiri Taluk, (IND No. - 434) (Call-2)** for an **Amount Rs. 148.41 Lakhs on** "Percentage Basis" through KPP Portal. The contractor's can Download and Submit the Completed Bid Documents through E-procurement **Website : www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in from 14-01-2026 to 21-01-2026 upto 5.30 p.m., Tenders shall be Submitted through KPP Portal only. Details for EMD Amount, Tender Processing Fee, Tender Clarifications, Qualification of Bidders, Tender Conditions etc., may be Obtained through KPP Portal.**

The queries if any may be clarified from this **Office upto 19-01-2026 @ 3.00 p.m. The Bid will be Opened on : 23-01-2026 @ 11.00 a.m. in Office of the Executive Engineer, V.J.N.L., YHP Division, No. 04, Madhugiri.** The undersigned reserves all rights to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons.

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
V.J.N.L., YHP Division, No. 4,
Madhugiri.

DIPR/Tumkur/68/Manipal/2025-26

Government of Karnataka
Senior Geologist, Dept. of Mines and Geology,
RTO Office Near, Sathyamangala,
Hassan.573201
ಇ–ಮೇಲ್ **ID – sghassan10@gmail.com, sghsn-dmg-ka@nic.in** ದೂ: 08172 200859

"PAPER NOTIFICATION"

E-tender has been invited from eligible outsourcing agencies for 04 staff namely Outsourced Work Supervisor (01 No.), Data Entry Operator (02 No.) and Office Assistant (01 No.) on through https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in/ portal from 08-01-2026 to 06-02-2026 for the supply of to work under the District Mineral Foundation Committee Cell (DMFT Cell) of Hassan District. Bid document and other details can be obtained from https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in/ or by visiting the office during office hours.

Sd/- Senior Geologist and Member Secretary, District Mineral Foundation Turst Hassan Dist. Hassan.

ವಾಸಾಸಂಇ/ಹಿಸನ/ಹಾಸನ/934/ಕೆಎಸ್ಎಂಸಿಎ/2025–26

CH CLASSIFIEDS
To place a classified ad contact: **080-41209042**

QUICK READ

Multiple ID Proofs Allowed For BMC Polling

MUMBAI

Voters in the upcoming Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation elections must show a voter photo ID card or any one of 12 other approved identity documents to cast their vote, officials said. Polling will be held in 227 civic wards from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm on Thursday, with counting on Friday. About 1,700 candidates are contesting. A total of 1,03,44,315 voters are eligible. Election officer Bhushan Gagrani urged voters to verify identity at booths.

Fire At BJP MP Ravi Shankar Residence

NEW DELHI

A fire broke out at the official residence of BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad on Mother Teresa Crescent Marg on Wednesday morning, officials said. Delhi Fire Services received a call around 8.05 am after furniture caught fire in one room. Three fire tenders rushed to the spot and controlled the blaze by 8.35 am. No casualties were reported, and it was not clear if the MP was present. Police forensics team inspected the site. Cause yet to be known.

Father Arrested In MP Honour Killing Case

BHIND

In a suspected honour killing, a 21-year-old woman, Nidhi Dhanuk, was allegedly shot dead by her father, Munnesh Dhanuk, in Khiriya Thapak village of Madhya Pradesh's Bhind district. Police arrested the accused and sent the body for post-mortem. The crime reportedly occurred on Tuesday evening in a mustard field using a country-made pistol. A murder case has been registered under Bharatiya Nyay Samhita, and police are probing the motive and firearm source.

Germany Deepens Strategic Partnership With India On Trade Defence

Leaders stressed defence ties, joint exercises, submarine talks, multiple MoUs, clean energy initiatives, visa-free transit, and youth cooperation

NEW DELHI

Germany has underlined India's growing importance as a trusted partner in trade, technology and security cooperation. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz used his first official visit to India to signal that Berlin views New Delhi as a key partner in a changing global order. The two-day visit covered Ahmedabad and Bengaluru and focused on trade, defence and technology. Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Merz in Ahmedabad, where meetings blended diplomatic talks with cultural programmes. Formal discussions and statements were held at Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar.

Economic ties were central to the visit. Merz was accompanied by a delegation of 23 German CEOs and industry leaders, highlighting business interest in India. Leaders noted that Germany accounts for more than one-fourth of India's trade with the European Union. Bilateral trade has reached record levels since 2024, encouraging both sides to expand cooperation.

Merz expressed support for the long-pending India–EU Free Trade Agreement and said it could be concluded by the end of January. Both countries welcomed a Joint Declaration of Intent to boost economic ties through a German-Indian CEO Forum, aimed at supporting investment, technology sharing and supply chains. Defence and security ties featured prominently, with both leaders backing joint military exercises, senior exchanges and a defence industry roadmap. Talks included a multi-billion euro submarine project in India. The countries signed 19 MoUs and announced eight initiatives in clean energy and digital fields. India welcomed Germany's visa-free transit for Indians, alongside new agreements on education, skills and youth exchanges.

DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran Sparks Row Over Women

CHENNAI

DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran on Tuesday sparked political controversy after remarks comparing women's status in northern states with that of Tamil Nadu. Speaking at Quaid-E-Millath Government College for Women in Chennai, Maran claimed that girls in many northern states are discouraged from pursuing education or careers and are instead urged to focus on household chores, while Tamil Nadu actively promotes women's empowerment.

Maran told students, "Our girls should be proud. In North India, they ask girls not to go for jobs and to stay inside the house, but here we want our girls to study."

He further said that northern states discourage English education, claiming girls are kept as "slaves" and warned that restricting education to Hindi contributes to unemployment there.

In contrast, he said Tamil Nadu's Dravidian model ensures equal access to education for boys and girls, leading to higher literacy and increased female workforce participation.

Praising the DMK government, Maran called Tamil Nadu the "best state in India" and said the administration follows Dravidian principles established by social reformer Periyar, emphasizing social justice and women's education.

His remarks drew strong criticism for broad generalizations. BJP leader Thirupathy Narayanan condemned Maran's statements, saying, "I strongly condemn his remarks, and he must apologise to the people of India, especially those who speak Hindi, whom he has portrayed as uneducated and uncivilised."

Pongal Celebrations Turn Political Ahead Tamil Polls

CHENNAI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi have added strong political colour to Pongal celebrations in Tamil Nadu, turning the harvest festival into a campaign stage ahead of Assembly elections scheduled later this year.

The visits by national leaders highlight the state's rising importance in national politics and the growing focus on winning voter support.

Last week, Shah attended a "Modi Pongal" event in Tiruchirappalli and urged BJP workers to prepare for victory in the polls.

The BJP is contesting the elections in alliance with the AIADMK led by former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswamy. On January 5, Shah joined Pongal rituals at Mannarpuram, where 1,008 earthen pots were used under the slogan "Namma Ooru Modi Pongal Vizha".

He also visited the Jambukeswarar and Ranganathaswamy temples and was accompanied by several Union Ministers and senior BJP leaders.

Chief Minister M K Stalin responded by highlighting welfare schemes and announcing a Pongal gift for over 2.22 crore ration card holders.

The DMK government distributed Rs 3,000 cash and food items, spending nearly Rs 6,936 crore to support families statewide.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi attended Pongal celebrations at a school in Udhagamandalam, with Congress workers projecting him as "Thalaiva".The visit aims to strengthen Congress within the DMK alliance, even as leaders demand a greater role if the coalition wins.

Senior DMK leaders rejected power sharing demands, stressing that the state will not have a coalition government.

Actor Vijay's TVK also faces challenges, including a CBI probe and a delayed film release, as political competition intensifies statewide ahead of the crucial Assembly elections later this year in Tamil Nadu state.

Kerala CM Vijayan Says Art Fights Religious Divisions

THRISSUR

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday emphasized that art should not only entertain but also awaken people to life's realities and oppose those who disturb peace in the name of religion. He spoke at the inauguration of the 64th Kerala School Kalolsavam, the state's largest student art festival, held in Thrissur, where around 14,000 students are participating across 249 events at 24 venues.

Vijayan said that historically, art was restricted to certain castes or religions due to feudalism and social evils like untouchability. "With the end of feudalism and the rise of democracy and secularism, art became accessible to all. School art festivals played a vital role in spreading secularism and democracy," he said.

Referring to Kalamandalam Hyderali, a legendary singer from Thrissur, the CM noted that the artist faced discrimination because of his religion. He stressed that humiliation based on religion cannot be accepted in a democratic society. Vijayan urged students to cultivate broad minds and respect experiences of people from all faiths, which "makes us civilized and cultured."

The CM warned that some people now try to confine art to certain religions, citing examples like Hindus being barred from Oppana or Muslims from learning Bharatanatyam. He said even Christmas carols and film characters face attacks in some areas. "Art is a powerful weapon to fight those who destroy peace and happiness," he said.

Vijayan encouraged the new generation to present art without caste or religious barriers and reject divisive ideas. He recalled that the festival began in 1956 with 200 participants and now continues to unite minds.

ED CONDUCTS I-PAC RAIDS; AGENCY REQUESTS ADJOURNMENT, TMC MOVES CALCUTTA HIGH COURT TO PROTECT DATA

Suvendu Adhikari Threatens Legal Action Over Coal Scam Allegations

KOLKATA

West Bengal opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday warned Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of legal action over her allegations linking him to a coal smuggling case. Adhikari said the deadline for Banerjee to respond to a defamation notice served by him had expired, and she had not replied.

In a post on X, he alleged that Banerjee's accusations were fabricated and reflected her "insalubrious mindset." He added, "Get ready to face legal consequences in court. Mamata Banerjee, now I will see you in court." Adhikari had served a legal notice on Banerjee last Friday, asking her to provide evidence within 72 hours to support her claims of his involvement in a coal scam. He warned that failure to do so would result in civil and criminal defamation proceedings. The notice, sent via advocate Suryaneel Das, cited Banerjee's public statements on January 8 and 9, linking Adhikari and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to the alleged scam without presenting supporting evidence.

Banerjee had also alleged that the Election Commission was biased and acting under Shah's instructions, accusing central agencies of targeting TMC MPs. She claimed that proceeds from the alleged coal scam were routed through Adhikari and BJP leaders to Shah.

M'rashtra Votes Civic Polls Mumbai Major Battleground

MUMBAI

Maharashtra goes to polls on January 15 for elections to 29 municipal corporations, with Mumbai emerging as the key battleground. The BJP-led Mahayuti faces a tough challenge from the Thackeray cousins' united front for control of the cash-rich Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis predicted that MNS leader Raj Thackeray would emerge as the biggest loser in his alliance with cousin Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT). He dismissed the recent local alliances of NCP factions in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad as limited developments.

The BJP has campaigned extensively, with Fadnavis, Eknath Shinde, and Ajit Pawar traveling across the state, while Uddhav and Raj Thackeray focused on Mumbai, Thane, Nashik, and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. Star campaigners like AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi, Telangana minister Mohammad Azharuddin, and Tamil Nadu BJP leader K Annamalai have also participated.

Polling for 2,869 seats across 893 Maharashtra wards will be held on January 15 from 7.30 am to 5.30 pm, with over 3.48 crore voters choosing among 15,931 candidates, including 1,700 in Mumbai and 1,166 in Pune. Counting is on January 16, with 25,000 police deployed.

This is the first BMC election since Shiv Sena's 2022 split. Mahayuti promises 50% BEST bus fare concession for women, the Thackeray front offers domestic worker allowances and property tax relief, while Congress focuses on pollution, fleet upgrades, and financial reforms.

Kerala Cong(M) Reaffirms Loyalty To LDF Front

KOTTAYAM

Kerala Congress (M) chairman Jose K Mani on Wednesday strongly denied all speculation about the party leaving the Left Democratic Front (LDF) ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections. Speaking to reporters in Kottayam, Mani said the party would remain firmly aligned with the CPI(M)-led ruling coalition, where it continues to hold significant influence in central districts of the state.

Mani criticized recent media reports suggesting a possible shift to the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), calling them "baseless" and "false news." He emphasized that Kerala Congress (M) has consistently maintained its stance to stay with the LDF and there was no reason to repeat it daily. "The Kerala Congress has only one stand — we are with the Left. We will remain firm in the LDF," he said.

Addressing reports about outreach from the UDF, Mani clarified that while invitations had come from various quarters, the party's position remained unchanged. He noted that media speculation over months highlights the strength of the KC(M). Mani also assured that there were no internal divisions in the party and that all five MLAs would act together.

Mani recalled that the party shifted from the UDF to the LDF after the death of his father and party leader K M Mani. He also explained his absence from the LDF's anti-Centre protest in Thiruvananthapuram due to a family emergency in Dubai, adding that all five MLAs participated in the event in his absence. Senior leaders Roshy Augustine and Pramod Narayanan also dismissed reports of any alliance change, reiterating the party's firm loyalty to the LDF ahead of the Assembly polls.

NIPAH VIRUS ALERT

2 Nipah-infected nurses critical; contact isolated, tests negative

KOLKATA

The condition of two nurses infected with the Nipah virus remains extremely critical after they were shifted to a government hospital in Kolkata on Wednesday, health officials said. Both nurses tested positive for the virus on Monday and were moved to the Beliaghata Infectious Diseases Hospital for advanced treatment. One nurse was brought to the hospital on Tuesday night, while the other, a house staff member, was shifted from Burdwan Medical College and Hospital early on Wednesday.

Officials said both patients are in a coma and are being treated in the intensive critical care unit. Meanwhile, a resident medical officer from Barasat hospital, who had come in contact with the infected nurses, showed symptoms linked to Nipah infection. The officer has been placed under isolation as a precautionary measure. However, medical tests conducted at the Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratory at AIIMS Kalyani returned negative results. Samples including nasal swab, blood, urine and throat swab were tested.

Health department sources said one of the nurses had recently returned from her hometown in Katwa in Purba Bardhaman district. She reportedly fell ill there and was admitted to a local hospital on December 31. As her condition worsened, she was transferred to Bardhaman Medical College. Later, she was moved by special ambulance to Barasat hospital and finally shifted to Kolkata.

Sources added that the second nurse had a recent travel history to Ghugragachi in Nadia district, close to the India Bangladesh border. Authorities have increased surveillance in connected areas. Nipah virus is a notifiable disease, and all confirmed or suspected cases must be immediately reported to the central government for further action.

QUICK READ

Maharashtra Strengthens Security For Board Exams

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has increased security for the upcoming Class 10 and 12 board exams. Sensitive exam centres will have CCTV cameras inside and outside halls, with footage accessible to officials throughout the exams. Drones and external cameras will monitor high-risk centres. Police and home guards will escort question papers during transport, and government vehicles may be used for safe delivery. Officers will be deployed at exam venues to prevent cheating, paper leaks, and any outside disturbances, ensuring smooth exam conduct.

Ranchi Children Rescued After Long Kidnapping Ordeal

RANCHI

Two children kidnapped from Ranchi were rescued safely on Wednesday, ending 13 days of fear for their family. Seven-year-old Ansh Kumar and six-year-old Anshika Kumari, missing from Dhurwa area, were found in Chitarpur, Ramgarh district. Ranchi Police arrested two accused from Aurangabad, Bihar, linked to the case. A special police team carried out the operation, and the children were unharmed. Earlier, authorities had announced a Rs 4 lakh reward for information leading to their safe recovery.

Man Seriously Injured Over Cow Smuggling Suspicion

RAJASTHAN

A man was critically injured after villagers allegedly beat him over cow smuggling suspicion in Khairthal-Tijara district. Sahun Khan and three others were seen trying to take three cows from a field. Villagers chased them; two escaped while Khan was caught and assaulted. He was admitted to Alwar district hospital and later referred to Jaipur for surgery. Doctors said he has fractures in his hands and legs. Police have started an investigation to determine the events and hold those responsible.

Murmu Receives Credentials From Austrian Ambassador Zischg

US Ambassador presents his credentials to Prez Murmu

NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday received credentials from Dr. Robert Zischg, the Austrian Ambassador to India, at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The ceremony also included the envoys of Trinidad and Tobago and the United States presenting their credentials.

Dr. Zischg expressed his honour in meeting the President and reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening Austria-India ties. He highlighted the longstanding friendship between the two nations, rooted in strong people-to-people links and economic cooperation. "During my tenure, I look forward to deepening cooperation and working closely with Indian partners," he said. The Austrian Embassy welcomed him on X, marking the official start of his duties and underlining the excellent bilateral relationship.

India and Austria formally established diplomatic relations on November 10, 1949. Over the years, both countries have maintained strong engagement in trade, culture, education, and technology. High-level visits in recent years have strengthened these ties, including Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg's visit to India in March 2022 and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Austria in early 2023.

In 2025, Jaishankar held discussions with Austrian Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger, reaffirming zero tolerance for terrorism and opposing nuclear blackmail. They also discussed bilateral cooperation and the Ukraine conflict. Dr. Zischg's presentation of credentials marks a new chapter in Austria-India relations, with both countries focusing on stronger economic, cultural, and diplomatic engagement.

Jaishankar Reviews Priorities With IORA Secretary General

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met IORA Secretary General Sanjiv Ranjan to discuss cooperation, trade, maritime security, and sustainable development in the Indian Ocean region.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday met Ambassador Sanjiv Ranjan, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), in New Delhi to review key areas of cooperation among member states.

The meeting focused on enhancing engagement across governments, businesses, and academic institutions, and strengthening partnerships to support sustainable and inclusive growth in the Indian Ocean region.

Sharing details on X, Jaishankar said, "Glad to meet Amb Sanjiv Ranjan, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, today in Delhi. Discussed priority areas for cooperation with the governments, businesses & academia of IORA member states." Discussions highlighted collaborative efforts within IORA to address shared economic, developmental, and security challenges. IORA serves as a multilateral platform for countries bordering the Indian Ocean to promote regional cooperation. Its agenda includes trade and investment facilitation, maritime safety, fisheries management, disaster risk reduction, tourism, and academic exchanges. India has been an active participant, advocating a results-oriented approach that delivers tangible benefits.

During the meeting, Jaishankar stressed the need for closer coordination among member states to unlock economic potential while maintaining regional stability and resilience.

He highlighted the role of businesses in trade and investment and academic institutions in innovation, capacity building, and policymaking. Ambassador Ranjan briefed Jaishankar on IORA's ongoing programmes and future priorities. Both sides agreed to translate dialogue into practical outcomes, reinforcing IORA's relevance amid a changing geopolitical and economic environment.

The interaction underscores India's commitment to multilateral engagement, maritime security, and sustainable development in the Indian Ocean region.

MNS chief Raj Thackeray slammed the State Election Commission over new campaign rules and PADU machines

Raj Thackeray Criticizes SEC Over New Election Rules

MUMBAI

As Maharashtra gears up for elections in 29 municipal corporations on Thursday, MNS chief Raj Thackeray launched a sharp attack on the State Election Commission (SEC). Speaking at his residence with Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, he criticized a recent notification allowing candidates to meet voters door-to-door until the day of polling. Traditionally, a 48-hour silence period is observed before voting, during which campaigning ends.

Addressing the media on Wednesday, Raj Thackeray expressed outrage, saying the rule could promote voter bribery. "They say you cannot distribute leaflets, but maybe they mean distributing money. Is the SEC serving the government's interests?" he asked. He also questioned the introduction of PADU machines, a backup device for vote counting, alleging that political parties and the public have not been shown how they work. He claimed that even after inquiries, including letters from Uddhav Thackeray, no clarity has been provided.

Raj Thackeray warned MNS and Shiv Sena workers to stay alert, alleging that opponents, particularly BJP and Shinde faction candidates, are hiding cash inside campaign pamphlets. "Watch the candidates visiting homes. People are rejecting this, but we must monitor money distribution closely," he said.

The SEC, represented by Dinesh Waghmare, clarified that the rules are based on a 2012 standing order allowing door-to-door visits after public campaigning ends. Rallies and large gatherings must still end 48 hours before polling. Door-to-door campaigning is limited to five people per group, without microphones or sound systems. Any distribution of cash or gifts is a criminal offence and is being closely monitored.

The allegations by Raj Thackeray have heightened tensions, raising questions about election fairness and transparency in Maharashtra's municipal elections.

Fadnavis Rules Out Any Future Alliance With Uddhav

MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday ruled out any future political alliance with the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) or Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray. He asserted that the BJP-led Mahayuti is fully capable of winning elections independently.

"We are never going to need the MVA or Uddhav in the future. We can never form an alliance with them. Yes, they are not our enemies, and we can have tea with them, but there will be no alliance," Fadnavis told.

He described the Mahayuti's civic poll campaign as "serious and professional" from day one, highlighting candidates from ordinary backgrounds, including vegetable vendors, middle-class individuals, advocates, and even people without homes. Fadnavis said the campaign received an overwhelming response from voters impressed by the work showcased before them.

India, Greece Hold Inaugural Joint Services Staff Talks

NEW DELHI

India and Greece held their first Joint Services Staff Talks in New Delhi, marking a major step in strengthening defence cooperation. The talks reflected growing strategic alignment between the two countries in security and military matters.

The meeting was co-chaired by senior officials from India's Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) and the Hellenic National Defence General Staff of Greece. Representatives from both sides discussed expanding military-to-military engagement through exchange programmes, capability development, and practical operational cooperation. Existing defence initiatives were reviewed, and new opportunities for collaboration across various domains were identified. In a post on X, HQ IDS said, "The inaugural India-Greece Joint Services Staff Talks were successfully conducted in New Delhi. Discussions focused on expanding bilateral military cooperation, exchange programmes, capability development, and measures to enhance operational engagement. Both sides reaffirmed commitment to strategic cooperation and regional and global security, marking a new era in India-Greece defence relations."

Last month, India and Greece held the first India-Greece Maritime Security Dialogue in Athens, covering maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean, Indo-Pacific, and Arctic regions. Both nations explored ways to strengthen maritime domain awareness, sustainable development of marine resources, naval collaboration, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and enhanced shipping connectivity. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening defence and maritime ties and agreed to hold the next round of talks in New Delhi after progress on agreed deliverables. The inaugural dialogue sets a strong foundation for future military cooperation, mutual trust, and joint efforts in regional and global security.

BJP's Guru Prakash Labels Rahul Gandhi Separatist Politics Example

NEW DELHI

BJP National Spokesperson Guru Prakash on Wednesday sharply criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, calling him a "perfect textbook example and case study of separatism in Indian politics." Addressing a press conference at BJP headquarters, he accused the Congress and opposition leaders of promoting regionalism, casteism, and linguistic chauvinism for electoral gains, which he said threatens national unity, peace, and stability.

Guru Prakash alleged that Rahul Gandhi's approach varies by state to maximise political benefits. "When he goes to Bihar, he spreads frenzy in the name of caste, and in Tamil Nadu, he engages in negative politics in the name of Tamil identity," he said, urging him to refrain from such divisive rhetoric.

Questioning Gandhi's comments on BJP's commitment to Tamil issues, the spokesperson said, "You have no authority to certify our dedication to Tamil culture. PM Modi's government has consistently respected and promoted Tamil language, culture, and heritage, both in India and globally." He highlighted the recognition of Tamil identity on international platforms such as the United Nations and the G20, emphasizing the Prime Minister's outreach to linguistic diversity through initiatives like Mann Ki Baat. Guru Prakash further warned that opposition leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, repeatedly try to inflame regionalism and caste-based politics, obstructing peace and stability. The remarks came after Rahul Gandhi supported the Vijay-starrer film Jana Nayagan and criticised the Centre over the CBFC's certification hold.

WATER CRISIS

Diarrhea Outbreak Claims Fifteen Lives

INDORE

An audit report on deaths in Bhagirathpura, Indore, suggests that 15 out of 21 fatalities may be linked to a recent outbreak of vomiting and diarrhea, sources said. The outbreak is believed to have been caused by contaminated drinking water in the area.

On Tuesday, five new diarrhoea cases were reported in Bhagirathpura. Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr. Madhav Prasad Hasani said the patients received treatment at local health centres. The administration has officially confirmed six deaths due to contaminated water, while locals claim 23 people, including a six-month-old child, have died so far.

A committee of senior doctors from Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College analysed the deaths and submitted the audit report to the administration. District Magistrate Shivam Verma said the report indicated some fatalities were linked to vomiting and diarrhoea, while others had unrelated causes. For certain cases, the exact cause of death could not be determined.

Since the outbreak on December 29, 436 patients were admitted to hospitals, with 403 discharged after recovery. Currently, 33 patients remain hospitalised, including eight in ICUs.

Verma added that the administration has provided Rs 2 lakh each to 18 affected families. "All deaths are very sad, regardless of cause. We are consoling families and providing support," he said.

The audit underscores the urgent need to address water contamination in Bhagirathpura and prevent further illness.

Authorities are monitoring the situation closely and taking measures to ensure safe drinking water for residents, while hospitals continue treatment for those affected by the outbreak.

Rajnath Singh Hails Ex-Servicemen As Pillars Of National Consciousness

NEW DELHI

Ex-servicemen rallies, wreath-laying ceremonies, grievance redressal counters, and help desks were held across India on Tuesday to mark the 10th Defence Forces Veterans' Day. The main event took place at the Manekshaw Centre in Delhi Cantt, attended by around 2,500 veterans from the Delhi-NCR region.

Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh paid tribute to veterans' courage, sacrifices, and dedicated service, describing them as living pillars of national consciousness and symbols of collective bravery. He urged veterans to mentor youth, guide Agniveers and young soldiers, assist civil authorities in emergencies, and promote social harmony, thereby strengthening patriotism and contributing to nation-building. Highlighting veterans' invaluable experience, leadership, and values, Singh said they can positively impact education, skill development, disaster management, community leadership, and innovation. He also remembered the sacrifices of soldiers involved in Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka, acknowledging that their contributions had previously gone unrecognised. Under PM Modi's leadership, these soldiers are now being honoured at the National War Memorial.

Singh praised veterans for their selfless service, discipline, and courage, noting that while uniforms and workplaces may change, the spirit of patriotism remains. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to their welfare, including the implementation of One Rank One Pension (OROP) and strengthening the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS). Remote healthcare through telemedicine is being expanded to ensure treatment reaches veterans in villages and remote areas.

QUICK READ

Tunisian journalist Chatha Belhaj Mubarak freed

Tunis

Tunisian journalist Chatha Belhaj Mubarak was released Wednesday after an appeal court reduced her prison sentence from five to two years. She had been jailed since 2023 in the "Instalingo" case, involving politicians, media figures, and allegations of conspiracy and financial crimes, which she denied. Her family said her health deteriorated in prison, with hearing loss and a cancer diagnosis. Authorities said the case followed official investigations into financial and security matters, rejecting claims of political motives. Mubarak's release highlights ongoing tensions in Tunisia, where several journalists and opposition figures face trials and sentences.

Nine babies die, Siberian doctors detained

Moscow

Russian authorities have detained the chief doctor and ICU head of a Siberian maternity hospital after nine newborns died between December 1, 2025, and January 12, 2026. Investigators said the deaths resulted from negligence in medical care. The doctors are under suspicion, and neither they nor their lawyers were immediately reachable. The tragedy sparked outrage nationwide, with citizens and politicians questioning how Russia can boost its birth rate amid such incidents, a key goal for President Vladimir Putin. Authorities continue investigating the case, which has drawn attention to safety and accountability standards in Russian hospitals.

France to open Greenland consulate February 6

Paris

France will open a consulate in Greenland on February 6, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot announced Wednesday. The move, planned since last year, comes amid tensions over U.S. interest in the Arctic territory. Barrot criticized Washington for "blackmailing" Greenland and said any attempt to control the autonomous Danish region would harm NATO relations and U.S. interests. The French consulate aims to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties in the Arctic, a region of growing strategic importance. Officials said the opening reflects France's commitment to supporting Greenland's autonomy and maintaining stability in the region amid international competition.

Crane collapse derails train killing dozens in Thailand

Transport Minister Phiphat ordered a full investigation into the crane collapse, part of an elevated high-speed rail project

BANGKOK

At least twenty five people were killed and around eighty injured after a construction crane collapsed onto a moving passenger train in northeastern Thailand on Wednesday, police said.

The accident happened in the Sikhio district of Nakhon Ratchasima province, about 230 kilometres from Bangkok. The train was travelling from the capital to Ubon Ratchathani when the crane fell on three of its carriages, causing the train to derail and briefly catch fire.

Police officials said rescue teams are still searching the wreckage for possible additional victims. Most of the deaths occurred in two carriages that were directly hit by the crane. About 195 passengers were on board at the time of the accident.

Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said he has ordered a full investigation to find out how the crane collapsed. Early reports said the crane was part of an elevated high speed rail project being built above the existing railway line.

Images from the site showed overturned train coaches lying beside shrubland, with firefighters working to put out flames as thick smoke rose from the wreckage. Rescue workers were seen pulling injured passengers from damaged carriages and rushing them to nearby hospitals.

The high speed rail project is one of several major infrastructure works underway in Thailand. It is planned to link Bangkok with the northeastern city of Nong Khai and further connect to China through Laos. Officials earlier said more than one third of construction on the Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima section had been completed.

China's foreign ministry said it was paying close attention to the incident and stressed the importance of safety at construction sites. Officials added that the exact cause of the crane collapse is still under investigation.

The tragedy has raised fresh concerns about construction safety and oversight near active transport routes. Authorities said support is being provided to victims' families, while emergency services continue recovery efforts and investigators work to determine responsibility and prevent similar accidents in the future.

Iran unrest death toll nears 2,600

DUBAI

HRANA confirmed over 2,400 protesters and nearly 150 government-linked deaths in Iran, with thousands arrested; an official earlier reported approximately 2,000 fatalities since unrest began

The death toll from widespread unrest in Iran has climbed close to 2,600, according to a United States based rights group, as protests continue to challenge the country's leadership amid rising economic pressure.

The demonstrations began on December 28 after sharp increases in prices and living costs. What started as economic protests has now grown into one of the most serious challenges faced by Iran's authorities in many years.

The HRANA rights group said it has confirmed the deaths of more than 2,400 protesters and nearly 150 people linked to the government. An Iranian official earlier placed the toll at around 2,000. Thousands have also been arrested since the unrest began.

Tensions have risen further after strong statements from former US President Donald Trump. He warned of serious action if Iran executes protesters and urged Iranians to continue demonstrations. However, he did not give details on possible steps. Israeli officials said assessments suggest possible US intervention, though timing and scale remain unclear.

Iran has increased diplomatic contacts with regional countries including Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Iranian officials said calm has returned and stressed their right to protect national security from foreign interference.

Information from Iran remains limited due to internet shutdowns. A US organisation said satellite internet services were being offered to help people access information.

Iranian authorities blame foreign powers for fuelling unrest and accuse violent groups of attacking public property and security forces. State media reported funerals for civilians and security personnel killed in the violence.

Rights groups also raised concerns about possible executions of detained protesters. Iranian officials have called for fast legal action against those accused of serious crimes.

Despite pro government rallies, analysts say the situation remains tense. The unrest comes as Iran continues to recover from last year's conflict and faces growing regional and international pressure.

Seoul weighs action after North drone claims

SEOUL

South Korea said it will take action based on the findings of an ongoing investigation into alleged drone incursions blamed on Seoul by North Korea, officials said Wednesday.

Unification Minister Chung Dong-young spoke during a policy briefing a day after Kim Yo-jong, the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, again demanded an apology for what Pyongyang says was a violation of its sovereignty.

North Korea's military claimed that drones carrying surveillance equipment crossed the border in September and again on January 4, calling the incident a serious breach.

Seoul quickly launched a probe, including the possibility that civilians may have been responsible, while stressing that the South's military did not send the drones or operate the models found in the North.

"The joint military-police team is working quickly, and once results are released, the government will respond accordingly," Chung said.

He criticised North Korea's use of media statements instead of direct inter-Korean channels, calling it unusual and unhealthy.

Chung urged both sides to restore broken communication lines and resume dialogue to reduce tensions.

Rights groups report only 60–70 detainees released since last week, criticizing slow pace and lack of official family information

Venezuela frees prisoners, claims disputed by groups

CARACAS

Venezuela's government said more than 400 prisoners have been released in recent days, but human rights groups say the real number is far lower, raising doubts about transparency.

Jorge Rodriguez, president of the National Assembly, told lawmakers that over 400 people had been freed as part of what he described as a move to encourage peaceful coexistence. He did not give clear details on when the releases began or how many people remain in custody.

Rights groups and local non government organisations say they can only confirm the release of about 60 to 70 detainees since last week. They criticised the slow pace of releases and complained about a lack of official information for families.

The issue of detainees has long been sensitive in Venezuela. Opposition leaders say many of those held are political prisoners, arrested after protests over the disputed 2024 election. The government denies this, insisting those detained broke the law or violated the constitution.

Rodriguez repeated this position in parliament, saying the people released were not political prisoners but politicians who had encouraged unrest or foreign intervention. He said the decision was made in the interest of national peace.

On Monday, Venezuela's prison authority said 116 people had been freed, adding to confusion over the true figure. Foro Penal, a leading rights group, estimates at least 800 political prisoners were still behind bars at the start of this year.

Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado has renewed calls for wider releases. Families and rights groups continue to report abuse in detention, including denial of medical care.

Cambodia accuses Thailand of truce violations

PHNOM PENH

Cambodia has accused Thai troops of continuing to occupy civilian areas along the disputed border, raising concerns over the December ceasefire that ended weeks of deadly clashes between the two neighbours.

Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn said Thai forces have placed barbed wire and shipping containers inside Cambodian territory, preventing thousands of families from returning home. He said up to four thousand families remain displaced despite the truce agreement.

Speaking to Reuters, Sokhonn said the situation is currently calm but still risky. He urged Thailand to fully respect the ceasefire terms and allow civilians to return safely to their villages along the frontier.

Thailand has rejected the accusations. Thai military and government officials said their troops are holding existing positions under the ceasefire rules and denied any occupation of Cambodian land. Bangkok described the claims as baseless and said it remains committed to de-escalation.

The December clashes followed an earlier round of fighting in July and lasted nearly three weeks. The violence killed more than one hundred people and displaced over half a million on both sides. The conflict is linked to a long running border dispute that has flared up repeatedly over the past century.

Cambodia has requested a meeting of the Joint Boundary Commission to resolve the issue, but Thailand has yet to confirm participation. Thai officials said talks will resume after a new government is formed following elections in February.

Seat sharing disputes rock Jamaat led alliance

DHAKA

With Bangladesh preparing for the February 12 general elections, internal cracks have surfaced within the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance as disputes over seat sharing continue to deepen, according to local media reports.

Despite a deadline to finalise arrangements, disagreements remain unresolved among some key alliance partners. Reports said eight of the eleven parties in the alliance have reached seat-sharing deals with Jamaat, while Islami Andolan Bangladesh and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis are yet to agree.

Sources said Islami Andolan initially demanded the right to contest more than one hundred seats. After weeks of talks, the party gradually lowered its demand, most recently seeking over fifty seats. However, Jamaat's offer of around forty seats has caused dissatisfaction within the party.

While some Islami Andolan leaders are open to accepting forty to forty five seats, others believe the alliance should be reconsidered if their demands are not met. This internal divide has added to the uncertainty.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis leaders also confirmed talks with Jamaat earlier this week but said no agreement was reached. The party is reportedly seeking twenty five to thirty seats, while Jamaat is offering a maximum of twenty. A senior leader said the party may field candidates independently in seats where no deal is finalised.

Local media noted that Jamaat and Islami Andolan, two of the country's largest Islamist groups, had held negotiations for more than three months to unite Islamist votes under a broader alliance. However, talks collapsed just before the December 29 nomination deadline.

As a result, both parties submitted nomination papers in hundreds of constituencies. Election Commission data shows Jamaat filed nominations in 276 seats, while Islami Andolan filed in 268 seats, intensifying tensions.

With polls nearing, political uncertainty is growing as alliances struggle to maintain unity amid rising competition and pressure.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

	4	7	5				9	2
9		3			1	4		
2			4	9		6		3
	6	5			9		1	4
3			1	8		2		
7		2			3	9		
		8			4	5		
	7		3	1			4	9
4	3	9	8		6	7		

4	3	6	1	2	8	7	5	9
9	5	1	7	4	6	2	8	3
8	7	2	3	5	9	4	1	6
7	8	5	9	1	4	3	6	2
2	1	3	6	7	5	8	9	4
6	9	4	2	8	3	5	7	1
5	2	8	4	9	1	6	3	7
1	6	7	5	3	2	9	4	8
3	4	9	8	6	7	1	2	5

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.

DIPLOMATIC BRIDGE BUILDER

George Vassiliou former president of Cyprus passes away

NICOSIA

George Vassiliou, the former president of Cyprus who guided the island closer to Europe and later into the European Union, has died at the age of 94. His wife Androulla said he passed away in hospital on Wednesday.

Vassiliou served as Cyprus president from 1988 to 1993 and was widely known as an "eternal optimist." He played a key role in moving Cyprus from post colonial uncertainty into Europe's political and economic system. His government applied for European Union membership in 1990, a process that later led to Cyprus joining the EU in 2004.

Born in 1931 to communist parents, Vassiliou spent his youth in Europe during turbulent Cold War years. As a young man in Hungary, he witnessed the 1956 uprising against Soviet rule. He once risked arrest by secretly carrying banned pamphlets to the West, offering the outside world rare details of the Soviet crackdown.

Trained in economics, Vassiliou later returned to Cyprus and built a successful market research business. In 1988, he surprised many by winning the presidency with support from the communist AKEL party, despite being a liberal with market friendly views.

As president, he introduced reforms, cut taxes, pushed for accountability, and worked tirelessly to reunite the divided island. He supported United Nations plans to bring Greek and Turkish Cypriots together, though these efforts ultimately failed.

Vassiliou also helped create Cyprus's first state university and worked to modernise the economy. After leaving office, he remained active in public life and European affairs.

Though he never achieved his dream of a reunited Cyprus, Vassiliou is remembered as a leader who believed strongly in dialogue, reform, and cooperation. His legacy lives on in Cyprus's place within Europe and its ongoing search for lasting peace.

NSW Premier wants Bondi Beach footbridge removed

SYDNEY

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns said the footbridge used by gunmen in last month's Bondi Beach terror attack should be removed. The bridge, linking a main road to a park near the beach, was used during the shooting that killed 15 people at a Hanukkah event. Minns said he feared it could become a "ghoulish reminder" if left standing, though the local council will make the final decision after consulting victims' families and the Jewish community. A national day of mourning for the victims will be observed on January 22, with flags at half-mast across Australia.

QUICK READ

Executive Centre India gets Sebi IPO nod

New Delhi

Executive Centre India has received approval from market regulator Sebi to raise Rs 2,600 crore through an initial public offering. Sources said the company plans a full fresh issue of shares, with no offer for sale by existing investors. The Mumbai-based firm provides premium flexible office and workspace solutions across key cities. Funds raised will be used to invest in its Abu Dhabi unit and support overseas expansion. A portion will also finance part payment for acquiring subsidiaries in Singapore and Dubai from its promoter group, as it strengthens its global footprint and long-term growth plans.

Groww parent Billionbrains profit drops in Q3

Mumbai

Billionbrains Garage Ventures, parent of online broker Groww, reported a sharp fall in profit for the third quarter of FY26. Consolidated net profit declined 28 percent to Rs 546.93 crore, while revenue rose nearly 25 percent to Rs 1,216 crore. Standalone profit also slipped. Despite industry slowdown, Groww added users steadily. Its transacting user base crossed two crore, with active users rising quarterly. Customer assets jumped 39 percent year-on-year. Market share improved in equities, derivatives, and mutual funds, while SIP inflows grew strongly during the quarter. The company remained confident about long-term growth and expanding retail participation.

Hyundai plans India as strategic export hub

Seoul

Hyundai Motor Group aims to turn India into a major export base as part of its global growth plans. Executive Chair Euisun Chung recently visited Hyundai and Kia plants in Chennai, Pune and Anantapur to review production and sales strategies. Hyundai holds nearly 20 percent share of the Indian auto market with capacity of 1.5 million vehicles annually. After listing Hyundai Motor India in 2024, the company plans deeper local focus. Chung said India's support helped Hyundai grow and stressed building a strong home brand for long-term success. The expansion strategy highlights India's rising role in Hyundai's global operations worldwide.

Turmeric board drives farmer growth and exports

Turmeric exports rose over 50.7% in 2024–25 to $341.54 million, with volumes increasing to 1.76 lakh tonnes

NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said the National Turmeric Board is playing a key role in empowering farmers and expanding India's turmeric exports across global markets.

Marking one year since the Board's launch, Goyal said it was created to strengthen production of the golden spice, support growers, and help India reach new export destinations. He said the Board has already made steady progress toward these goals.

In a message shared on social media, the minister said the initiative is opening fresh opportunities for farmers, traders, and exporters while taking India's agricultural strength to the world. He wished the Board continued success in building value for all stakeholders.

Official data shows turmeric exports jumped by over 50.7 per cent in the 2024–25 financial year to 341.54 million dollars, up from 226.58 million dollars in the previous year. Export volumes also rose to more than 1.76 lakh metric tonnes, compared to 1.62 lakh metric tonnes a year earlier.

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada told Parliament that India now holds around 66 per cent of the global turmeric market. The country's leading importers since 2020 include Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Malaysia, and Morocco.

The National Turmeric Board is working to promote new product development, value addition, and wider global awareness of turmeric and its uses. It is also focused on building strong and sustainable supply chains by improving farm linkages, logistics, and export infrastructure.

In addition, the Board is encouraging strict quality and safety standards across the turmeric supply chain, aiming to boost farmer incomes, ensure consistency, and strengthen India's leadership in the global spice trade.

Madhya Pradesh leads PRAGATI with rapid clearances

BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh has emerged as one of the best performing states on India's PRAGATI platform, resolving nearly all project hurdles and pushing infrastructure growth at a fast pace, Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav said on Wednesday.

PRAGATI, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, is a digital system that tracks major projects, public complaints, and government schemes through real time dashboards instead of files. It brings together the Centre and states to remove delays and improve delivery.

Dr Yadav said Madhya Pradesh has monitored 209 projects through the Project Monitoring Group portal, involving investments worth Rs 7.86 lakh crore. These projects cover key sectors such as power, roads, railways, telecom, coal, oil and gas, metro rail, renewable energy, and urban infrastructure.

Dr. Yadav stated Madhya Pradesh monitored 209 projects via the Project Monitoring Group portal, totaling Rs 7.86 lakh crore, spanning power, transport, energy, telecom, and urban infrastructure sectors

The state has raised 322 issues under the PMG system and resolved 312 of them, achieving a strong 97 per cent resolution rate. Under PRAGATI reviews, 124 issues were flagged across 39 projects, of which 120 were cleared. Only four issues remain pending.

Chief Secretary Anurag Jain said two pending matters relate to forest clearances, where procedures are complete, while two involve land acquisition that will be resolved soon. The state currently has an active infrastructure pipeline worth Rs 5.24 lakh crore.

Since its launch, PRAGATI has held 50 meetings for Madhya Pradesh, tracking projects worth Rs 1.74 lakh crore. Twenty projects are complete and nineteen are ongoing, including major railway, highway, and power schemes.

A key success story is the Jabalpur Gondia rail gauge conversion project. After years of delay, PRAGATI helped clear hurdles, leading to full completion by 2021. The project improved connectivity, trade, jobs, and access to services in central India.

Goa VAT bill eases rules for small dealers

PANAJI

The Goa government tabled a bill in the state assembly to simplify tax rules for small dealers, reduce repeated paperwork, and set clear deadlines for settlement applications.

The Goa Value Added Tax Amendment Bill, 2026, presented by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant during the winter session, proposes changes to the VAT law governing the composition scheme for traders.

The move aims to lower compliance pressure on small businesses and support ease of doing business across the state.

Under the proposal, eligible dealers will need to choose the composition option only once, instead of renewing it every financial year. The option will stay valid until a dealer exits voluntarily or becomes ineligible due to turnover limits or other conditions.

Dealers covered under the scheme can pay tax at a fixed rate on total turnover, replacing regular VAT liability. The commissioner may allow payment in full or in instalments. The bill also allows dealers to opt in during the year by filing a self declaration on turnover.

To prevent misuse, composition dealers cannot claim input tax credit, charge VAT on invoices, or issue tax invoices. Separate accounts will be required for different business categories.The bill closes new settlement applications after June 30, 2026, and introduces an appeal right before the VAT Tribunal.

Indian equities enter 2026 on firmer footing

MUMBAI

Indian equity markets are entering 2026 on a firmer footing after a year of consolidation, with improving valuations, realistic earnings expectations, and strong domestic fundamentals shaping a more positive outlook, according to a report released on Wednesday.

Despite possible global risks, market experts said India's macroeconomic base remains solid and supportive of long term growth.

Smallcase managers believe the New Year will favour earnings driven investing rather than short term momentum trading, encouraging discipline and careful stock selection.

The report expects a consumption led growth cycle in 2026, supported by moderate inflation, tax relief, GST cuts, and interest rate reductions that raise household income and ease borrowing.

Sonam Srivastava, founder of Wright Research, said valuations now look reasonable and earnings expectations are realistic, giving investors confidence in stability.

She added that returns are likely to come from company performance instead of valuation expansion.

Another expert, Sneha Jain, said large cap stocks appear attractive after last year's valuation reset.

She noted that strong balance sheets, steady cash flows, and governance make them a stability anchor.

Looking ahead, experts expect Budget 2026 to maintain policy continuity through fiscal discipline, infrastructure spending, and support for manufacturing and small businesses.

Measures to widen household participation, improve credit access, and strengthen confidence could further reinforce India's steady investment outlook in the coming year.

Overall, analysts said steady reforms, predictable taxation, and sustained growth signals may help markets stay resilient, attract long term capital, and support balanced, risk aware investment decisions across sectors, while keeping volatility manageable for retail and institutional investors alike during an evolving global economic environment this year ahead today.

Manufactured products in the Wholesale Price Index rose 0.41%, with 13 groups up, 8 down, key items increasing

Wholesale inflation rises slightly as price pressures ease

NEW DELHI

India's wholesale price inflation rose to 0.83 per cent in December 2025, moving into positive territory after remaining negative in recent months. Official data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed the increase was mainly driven by higher prices of manufactured goods and minerals.

Food inflation at the wholesale level stayed flat at zero per cent in December, as food prices did not rise compared to the same month last year. This helped keep overall inflation under control despite pressure from industrial items.

Manufactured products, which carry the highest weight in the Wholesale Price Index, rose by 0.41 per cent during the month. Out of twenty two product groups, prices increased in thirteen, declined in eight, and remained unchanged in one. Key items that saw price rises included basic metals, chemicals, textiles, and non metallic mineral products.

At the same time, prices fell in sectors such as rubber and plastic products, food products, electronics, paper, and beverages compared to November 2025. The return to positive inflation comes after WPI inflation was negative at minus 0.32 per cent in November and minus 1.21 per cent in October.

On the consumer side, retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index stood at 1.33 per cent in December, slightly higher than 0.71 per cent in November. Food inflation under CPI remained negative at minus 2.71 per cent, marking the seventh straight month of falling food prices.

The Reserve Bank of India remains confident about the inflation outlook. It has cut its inflation forecast for 2025–26 to 2 per cent and reduced the repo rate to support growth. The RBI said strong growth and low inflation offer a rare balance for the economy.

Warehousing leasing demand rises strongly across India

NEW DELHI

Industrial and warehousing leasing demand across India's top eight cities stayed strong in 2025, growing by 16 per cent to reach 36.9 million square feet, according to a new report released on Wednesday.

The report said Delhi NCR led the market with a 24 per cent share of total demand, followed closely by Chennai with 22 per cent. Together, these two cities emerged as the biggest drivers of industrial and warehousing activity during the year.

On a quarterly basis, demand remained healthy in the last quarter of 2025, touching about 10.4 million square feet. Chennai and Pune together accounted for 56 per cent of this quarterly demand, highlighting strong regional activity.

Third party logistics firms were the largest contributors, making up 32 per cent of total leasing during the year. Demand from engineering and e commerce companies also increased, adding momentum to the sector.

Experts said large transactions played a major role. Deals above 200,000 square feet formed nearly 45 per cent of total leasing activity in 2025, showing growing confidence among occupiers.

Delhi NCR and Chennai each recorded more than 8 million square feet of leasing during the year, jointly contributing over 45 per cent of overall demand. Pune and Mumbai followed, with around 5 million square feet each.

Demand for Grade A warehouses remained high, especially in key hubs with strong manufacturing bases and good connectivity. Analysts expect these major markets to account for up to 80 per cent of demand in 2026 as well.

New supply also increased to 41.7 million square feet, up 15 per cent from the previous year. This reflects improved developer confidence and an optimistic outlook for India's industrial and logistics real estate sector.

RECORD TRADE MOMENTUM

Germany pitches India as core global partner

NEW DELHI

Germany's new Chancellor Friedrich Merz used his first official visit to India to send a strong message that New Delhi is now a key partner for trade, technology, and security. The two day visit took place in Ahmedabad and Bengaluru and mixed diplomacy, business, and culture at a time when global ties are under strain.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Merz in Ahmedabad, where meetings were held at Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar. The leaders spoke to the media and shared plans to deepen cooperation in trade, defence, and innovation, while also highlighting shared democratic values.

Economic cooperation stood at the centre of the visit. Merz arrived with a delegation of twenty three German chief executives and industry leaders. Both sides noted that Germany already makes up more than one quarter of India's total trade with the European Union, with trade touching record levels since 2024.

Merz also gave political support to the long pending India European Union Free Trade Agreement. He said the deal could be finalised by the end of January. A new Joint Declaration of Intent was announced to strengthen economic ties through a German Indian CEO Forum.

Defence and security talks received rare focus. The leaders backed closer military engagement, joint exercises, and a roadmap for defence production. Talks included a major plan to build submarines in India, matching Make in India goals.

Beyond defence, both countries signed nineteen agreements covering clean energy, digital tools, education, skills, youth exchanges, and visa free transit, aiming to build a long lasting partnership focused on people, growth, trust, mobility, sustainability, innovation, and shared future together globally.

S. Korean chipmakers face rising patent threats

SEOUL

South Korean chipmakers are facing rising risks from so-called patent trolls as a global artificial intelligence boom pushes profits higher and draws legal attention, industry watchers said Wednesday.

Non-practicing entities, known as patent trolls, earn money by licensing or enforcing patents without making products, often targeting successful companies.

Concerns have grown as Samsung Electronics and SK hynix report record earnings and expand their global market presence, making them attractive litigation targets.

Analysts also point to tougher patent protection policies in the United States, where safeguards against abusive lawsuits have weakened.

A review system introduced in 2011 once helped challenge weak patents, but rule changes later sharply reduced its impact.

Industry observers warn that frequent lawsuits could drain resources, slow research, and hurt long-term competitiveness in semiconductors, a core national industry.

They urge South Korea to raise concerns with Washington and global forums while preparing legal defenses.

Meanwhile, Samsung Electronics showed strength in consumer markets. It ranked second globally in smartphone shipments in 2025, growing five percent year-on-year, driven by strong demand for affordable models.

Samsung's market share rose to nineteen percent, while Apple led with twenty percent, highlighting intense competition even as legal risks cloud the booming chip industry's future outlook.

Experts say clear patent rules, balanced enforcement, and fair reviews are vital to protect innovation while ensuring healthy competition across global technology markets in the years ahead, supporting investment, jobs, supply chains, exports, and long-term growth for South Korea's economy, companies, engineers, startups, suppliers, and research ecosystems worldwide, amid fast AI adoption, rising demand, shifting geopolitics, regulatory change, legal uncertainty, and evolving global trade ties today.

THE HIDDEN CRISIS of Bangladeshi Migration in India's Urban Shadows

In the sprawling streets of Bengaluru, beyond the gleaming glass towers and bustling IT parks, another economy thrives—one built on the backs of those few notice. Construction sites hum with activity from dawn to dusk, towers rise story by story, yet the workers who make it possible remain largely invisible to the city's conscience. They are here because economic desperation knows no border, because crop failures have ruined agricultural livelihoods back home, and because wages that would barely sustain survival in villages can translate to desperate hope in cities. Among these workers, Bangladeshi migrants represent a particularly vulnerable and crucial segment—living in shadows, working without documentation, and existing in the legal gray zones of Indian urban centers. The story of Bangladeshi migrants in India is not new, but it is increasingly urgent. It encompasses economic necessity and systemic exploitation, government enforcement and human rights violations, survival ingenuity and institutional failure. This is the story of millions navigating between countries without papers, countries that want them gone, and an economy that cannot function without them.

Migration Scale

- 456 million internal migrants in India (2011 census) = 1/3 of population
- 32+ lakh people migrated to Karnataka in 2024
- 35% of urban Karnataka population comprises migrants
- 20 million estimated illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India
- 15 lakh migrant laborers sustain Bengaluru construction industry alone

Employment Data

- 52 million construction workers employed nationwide (2018-19)
- 90% of labor force employed in informal sector globally in low-income countries
- 53% of Indian economy comprises underground/informal sector
- 3D Jobs: Dangerous, Dirty, Demanding work classifications for migrant employment

The Economic Engine: Why Migrants Cannot Be Ignored

Construction remains the single largest employer of migrant laborers across Indian cities, with approximately 52 million people employed in the sector nationwide. In Bengaluru alone, 15 lakh migrant laborers sustain the construction industry, yet this contribution remains economically quantified but socially invisible.

In 2024, over 32 lakh people migrated to Karnataka seeking employment opportunities, with 35% of the state's urban population comprising internal and international migrants.

These numbers are not abstractions—they represent the difference between infrastructure completion and stalled projects, between urban development and economic standstill. Bangladeshi migrants specifically occupy the lowest rungs of this economic ladder, concentrated in roles others refuse: brick-laying, cement carrying, garbage segregation, domestic service, and rag-picking. They work not out of ambition but desperation, escaping crop failures and village debt cycles where daily wages hover around ₹20.

Their willingness to accept lower compensation has created an unfortunate dynamic where wages in construction and labor-intensive sectors become suppressed across the board. Yet without this "reserve army of labor," as economists term it, India's rapid urbanization would stall entirely. The irony is cruel: the economy depends utterly on workers it simultaneously criminalizes.

The domestic work sector tells a parallel story. In apartment complexes across Indian metros, Bangladeshi women work as domestic helpers, often earning between ₹3,000 to ₹8,000 monthly for back-breaking work with no contracts, no legal protections, and constant vulnerability to abuse. These workers sustain middle-class lifestyles in cities, handle household tasks that enable dual-income families, care for children and elderly relatives—yet remain systematically exploited and legally nonexistent.

The Invisible Crossing: Routes, Methods, and Human Cost

Migration from Bangladesh to India follows well-established though dangerous pathways. Migrants typically enter through jungle routes across the Bangladesh-India border, particularly in areas near the 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. The preferred entry points include Hakimpur, Tarali, and Jaynagar—locations that have become so frequently used that locals and traffickers have carved out established corridors through bamboo forests and agricultural lands.

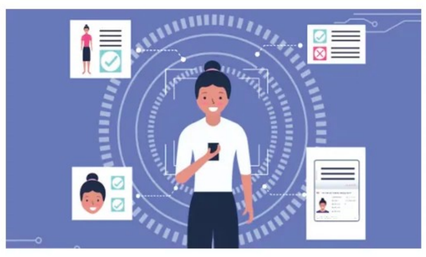
Once inside Indian territory, migrants utilize railway networks as their primary means of reaching destination cities. Express trains carry migrants through transit states like Assam before dispersing them to urban centers across the country. The calculus is simple: railways offer relative anonymity in crowded compartments, and the journey costs less than alternative routes. Recent security operations have documented migrants traveling on trains with fake identity documents, though detection remains sporadic given the volume of daily railway travel.

The entry process rarely begins with individual initiative. Labor brokers and trafficking agents facilitate the crossing, charging substantial fees—sometimes ₹10,000 to ₹50,000 per person—which migrants then spend years repaying through wage deductions. This debt-bondage structure traps workers in exploitative cycles where earnings are redirected to intermediaries rather than accumulated for survival or eventual return migration.

Recent developments underscore the dangers of these routes. In late 2025, coordinated police operations intensified verification drives across states, triggering a reverse migration wave. Hundreds of migrants lined up at border checkposts, fearing intensified scrutiny under special identification and registration (SIR) drives launched by the Election Commission. Those same jungle corridors that enabled entry became routes of retreat as migrants rushed homeward, fearing arrest and deportation.

Border Crossing Routes

- Entry Points: Hakimpur, Tarali, Jaynagar, 24 Parganas (West Bengal)
- ₹10,000-50,000 broker fees per person (repaid through wage deductions)
- 2-3 days typical border crossing duration
- 24-48 hours railway transit to destination cities
- Peak Seasons: March-May, September-November (agricultural off-season)



The Paper Game: How Fake Documents Create Parallel Identities

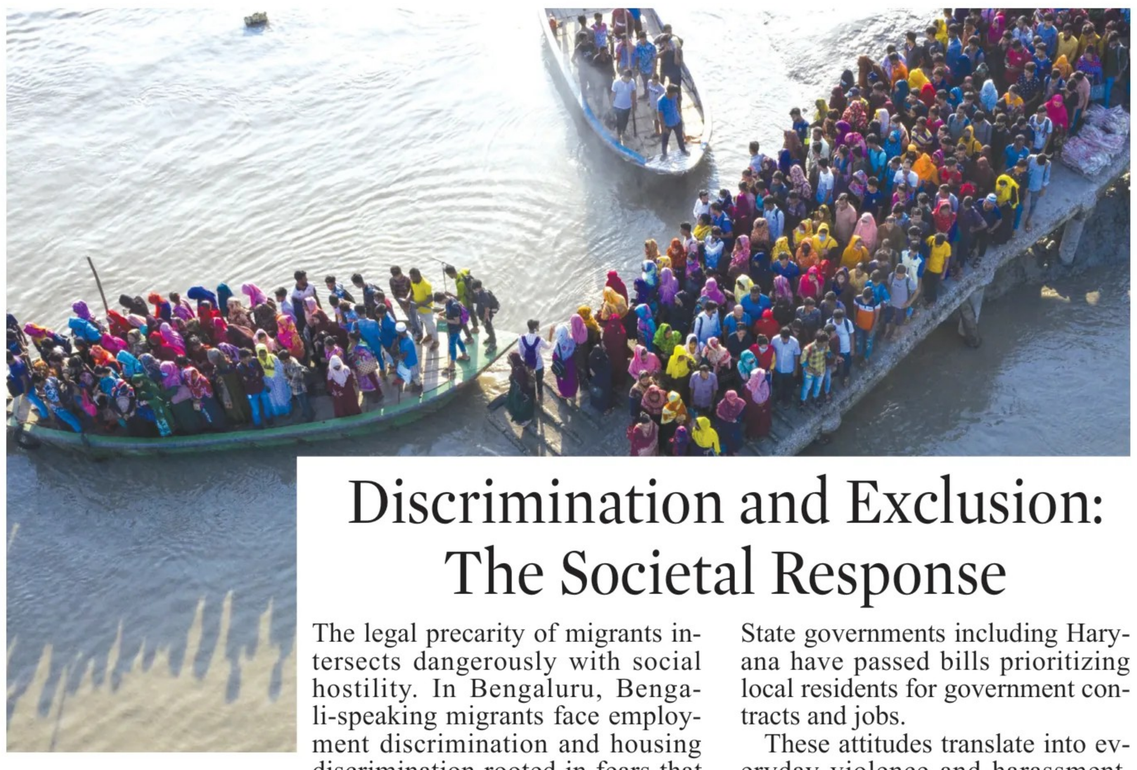
In August 2025, authorities busted a major Aadhaar forgery racket in Uttar Pradesh that exemplifies the document fraud ecosystem. Police arrested ten individuals allegedly involved in creating fake Aadhaar cards and identity documents for Bangladeshi nationals, Rohingya refugees, and Nepalese migrants. The gang operated across at least nine Indian states—Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Delhi-NCR, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Haryana, and Uttarakhand—exploiting systemic vulnerabilities in enrollment processes.

The method was sophisticated yet revealing. Gang members took temporary employment at legitimately registered jan seva kendras (enrollment centers authorized by the Unique Identification Authority of India), gaining insider knowledge of Aadhaar registration procedures. They then obtained unauthorized access credentials and passwords, capturing biometric data—fingerprints and iris scans—without proper authorization. Using VPNs and remote-access tools, they created fraudulent entries in the Aadhaar system and modified existing records. For migrants with no prior Indian documentation, the gang fabricated supporting documents: birth certificates showing false dates of birth, residence proofs, and affidavits signed with fake government seals.

The pricing structure reflected market forces: each fake Aadhaar card cost between ₹2,000 and ₹40,000 depending on the urgency and complexity. Once obtained, these fake documents enabled migrants to access passports, open bank accounts, claim government benefits, and navigate bureaucratic systems designed to exclude them. A single Aadhaar number became the skeleton key to an otherwise locked India.

Yet document fraud extends beyond Aadhaar cards. Delhi Police operations in December 2024 dismantled another immigration racket involving 11 individuals who forged voter identity cards, ration cards, and other critical identity documents using both electronic and manual methods. They operated fake websites mimicking government portals, further deepening the sophistication of the fraud ecosystem.

The technical vulnerabilities enabling this fraud reveal uncomfortable truths about identification systems. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology used to verify ID documents achieves only approximately 90% accuracy, even under optimal conditions. Fraudsters deliberately manipulate image quality or obscure text, knowing that software failures route cases for superficial manual review. Most verification systems prioritize text extraction over document integrity validation—capturing content without detecting tampering. Biometric spoofing exploits hardware weaknesses; fake fingerprints made from silicone or gel molds can deceive basic scanners, and iris-scan systems similarly vulnerable to manipulation.



Discrimination and Exclusion: The Societal Response

The legal precarity of migrants intersects dangerously with social hostility. In Bengaluru, Bengali-speaking migrants face employment discrimination and housing discrimination rooted in fears that undocumented Bangladeshis are infiltrating Indian cities.

Housing societies have collectively decided to not employ Bengali-speaking workers—a prejudicial policy that harms not only undocumented migrants but also Bengali-speaking Indian citizens and West Bengali migrants who are legal residents.

The discrimination reflects deeper anxieties about demographic change and cultural identity. Nationalist movements in various states explicitly frame internal and international migration as threats to regional identity. "Sons of Soil" ideologies in states like Maharashtra advocate employment preference for local residents, framing migrants as wage suppressors and cultural invaders. State governments including Haryana have passed bills prioritizing local residents for government contracts and jobs.

These attitudes translate into everyday violence and harassment. Migrant workers face name-calling, hostile stares, eviction threats, police interrogation, and physical violence. The combination of legal precarity and social hostility creates what researchers term "social and legal marginalization"—a two-front vulnerability where both state systems and community members treat migrants as threatening outsiders.

Yet integration does occur in specific contexts. Research indicates that approximately 60.8% of Bangladeshi migrants receive help from local Indian residents—significantly higher than comparable rates for Nepalese migrants. Some migrants reciprocate by assisting locals, suggesting that day-to-day community relationships can transcend policy-level hostility.

Mistaken Identity: When Verification Systems Fail the Legitimate

The dangers of these verification failures extend beyond empowering fraud—they harm legitimate populations. Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC) update between 2015 and 2019 provides a cautionary case study in systemic error. The NRC aimed to identify undocumented immigrants residing in Assam since 1971, a nominally legitimate administrative purpose. Yet implementation revealed profound flaws in identity verification systems.

The Assam government collected biometric data from 27.43 lakh individuals during the appeals and claims process. The Unique Identification Authority of India then locked this biometric data on servers, initially denying Aadhaar cards to these individuals based on a misinterpretation of a Supreme Court order intended to prevent undocumented migrants from obtaining identity documents.

For over five years, lakhs of legitimately included NRC individuals were locked out of Aadhaar—a document they were legally entitled to obtain under the Aadhaar Act, which requires only 182 days of residence. Workers like Salima Begum, a domestic worker from Guwahati who made it into the final NRC, remained unable to access government benefits, scholarships, and welfare initiatives despite being legal residents. The administrative confusion was eventually acknowledged: officials admitted in 2024 that the biometric lockdown represented a misunderstanding of judicial instructions, and 9.35 lakh biometric records were finally unlocked.

Yet this resolution brought bitter irony. The actual number of people whose biometrics had been collected was revealed to be 9.35 lakh, not 27.43 lakh as officials had repeatedly reported to state assemblies. The discrepancy was dismissed as "a fiction created by someone," offering no explanation for years of official false reporting or compensation for those wrongfully denied documents.

This case illustrates a systemic danger: verification systems designed to exclude undocumented migrants inevitably harm documented populations as well. The boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate prove porous in practice, and administrative errors become human tragedy for those caught in the bureaucratic net.

Manchester United hires MICHAEL CARRICK as head coach until season's end

MANCHESTER

Manchester United have turned to former player Michael Carrick in an attempt to rescue their troubled season, appointing him as head coach until the end of the campaign following the dismissal of Ruben Amorim last week.

Carrick, who enjoyed a trophy-laden playing career at Old Trafford, was confirmed in the role. The former England midfielder won five Premier League titles and the UEFA Champions League during his 12 years at United and remains one of the most decorated players of the club's modern era. He also previously served as an assistant coach and had an unbeaten three-match stint as interim manager after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was sacked in 2021.

Former midfielder returns to Old Trafford hoping to steady faltering campaign

On this occasion, Carrick was chosen ahead of Solskjaer, who was also interviewed for the post. "I know what it takes to succeed here," Carrick said. "My focus is now on helping the players reach the standards we expect at this incredible club." The appointment gives United breathing space to search for a long-term successor to Amorim, the sixth permanent manager to be removed since Sir Alex Ferguson retired in 2013. Although initially a short-term deal, United notably avoided labelling Carrick as an interim coach, leaving open the possibility of an extended stay should results improve over the remaining 17 matches. Carrick's only full-time managerial experience came at Championship side Middlesbrough from 2022 to 2025, where he failed to secure promotion to the Premier League. Former England assistant Steve Holland will join his coaching staff.

His task is daunting. United sit seventh in the Premier League and face back-to-back tests against Manchester City and Arsenal. With domestic cups already gone, Carrick's immediate priority is to drive a push for Champions League qualification and restore belief among players and supporters alike. "There is still a lot to fight for," Carrick said, expressing "total belief" in the squad as United look to halt their post-Ferguson decline.

Brentford's Thiago eyes WC berth

LONDON

Brentford forward Igor Thiago has already written his name into Premier League history, and the Brazilian is now daring to dream of carrying his remarkable journey all the way to the World Cup. The 24-year-old set a new benchmark for Brazilian players in England's top flight earlier this month, scoring twice in Brentford's 3-0 win over Sunderland to take his season tally to 16 goals. That haul eclipsed the previous single-season Premier League best of 15 goals jointly held by Roberto Firmino, Gabriel Martinelli and Matheus Cunha.

Driven by a desire to honour the memory of his father and inspired by Cristiano Ronaldo's rise at Manchester United, Thiago has emerged as one of the league's most feared strikers. His imposing physical presence and ruthless finishing have transformed Brentford's attack, helping the club surge to fifth place and into unlikely contention for Champions League qualification.

Thiago's rise has been anything but conventional. Just three years ago, he was a relatively unknown figure at Bulgarian side Ludogorets Razgrad. His goals there earned a move to Club Brugge in 2023, before Brentford signed him for a club-record £30 million in 2024.

A serious knee injury delayed his impact, but he has made up for lost time this season following the departures of Bryan Mbeumo and Yoane Wissa. He announced his return in style with goals against Nottingham Forest, Manchester United and Liverpool, before smashing a hat-trick at Everton and breaking the Brazilian record days later. Off the pitch, Thiago's story is equally compelling. After losing his father at 13, he worked as a bricklayer and fruit seller to support his family, while his mother collected rubbish in their hometown near Brasilia.

Now linked with a move to Arsenal, Thiago has also thrust himself into Brazil's World Cup conversation. "It's my biggest goal," he said. "When I reach there, it will mean I've made it."

Semenyo strikes again as Guardiola's City seize control of semi-final tie

Antoine Semenyo an instant hit as Man City close on League Cup final

NEWCASTLE

Antoine Semenyo made an immediate impact at Manchester City as the newly signed forward inspired a 2-0 victory over Newcastle United in the first leg of the English League Cup semi-final at St James' Park on Tuesday.

The Ghana international, who completed a £65 million move from Bournemouth last week, opened the scoring and had another effort controversially ruled out as Pep Guardiola's side took a major step towards reaching their first League Cup final since 2021. Rayan Cherki added a late second in the 98th minute to deliver what could prove a decisive blow ahead of the return leg on February 4.

Semenyo has enjoyed a dream start to life at the Etihad Stadium. He scored on his debut in Saturday's 10-1 FA Cup rout of Exeter and followed it up with another crucial strike on his first League Cup appearance. In previous seasons, he would have been cup-tied after featuring earlier in the competition for Bournemouth, but a rule change this year allowed City to field him — a decision that drew criticism from Newcastle manager Eddie Howe before kickoff.

Guardiola named a strong lineup, underlining his determination to lift the trophy, with Erling Haaland making his first League Cup start in three years just days before City's Premier League clash with Manchester United.

Newcastle started brightly, with Yoane Wissa blazing an early chance over the bar. James Trafford then kept City level with a superb save from Wissa's header, while Bruno Guimaraes struck the post as the hosts pressed early in the second half.

City weathered the storm and struck clinically when Jeremy Doku's low cross was turned into Semenyo's path, allowing the forward to prod home from close range. A second Semenyo goal was later chalked off after a lengthy VAR review.

Newcastle pushed for a response but were left exposed late on, and Cherki swept in Rayan Ait-Nouri's cross to seal a commanding advantage, leaving City firmly in control of the tie.

Kuttappa back in charge as head coach of men's boxing team

NEW DELHI

Dronacharya awardee CA Kuttappa has returned as the head coach of the Indian men's boxing team for a third stint, the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) confirmed, signalling a renewed push to revive the country's fortunes in the ring after a difficult phase.

The Services man replaces SAI Rohtak coach Dharmender Yadav, who was appointed last year. Yadav, however, will continue within the men's coaching set-up, ensuring continuity as the team prepares for a packed international calendar. "Yes, CA Kuttappa has been appointed as the coach in charge and Dharmender Yadav will also continue to be a part of the coaching staff," BFI Executive Director Col Arun Malik told.

The leadership change follows an underwhelming couple of years for Indian men's boxing. Only two male boxers qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics, and the slide deepened at the 2025 World Championships in Liverpool, where the men's contingent failed to secure a single medal for the first time in 12 years.

Kuttappa brings vast experience to the role, having earlier guided the men's team during both the Tokyo and Paris Olympic cycles. He has been closely associated with several landmark moments in Indian boxing and was part of the national support staff at the 2008 Beijing Games, where Vijender Singh won India's first-ever Olympic boxing medal. Meanwhile, former High Performance Director Santiago Nieva, appointed as the women's foreign coach last month, has joined the national camp. SAI's Geeta Chanu will serve as coach in charge of the women's team. Boxers assembled at the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NIS), Patiala, on January 12 and will train there until March 14. As per BFI's 2026 selection policy, top performers from the National Championships, along with select wildcard entrants, have been inducted to ensure depth and competition. With the Asian Championships, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games on the horizon, 2026 shapes up as a pivotal year, beginning with the Boxam International Tournament in Spain from February 2.

HIL crosses 1 billion social media views, TV audience surges sharply

CHENNAI1

The Hero Hockey India League (HIL) has crossed a landmark one billion social media views just over two weeks into the 2025–26 season, with TV viewership also witnessing a significant uptick, organisers announced.

The season began on December 28 with the Women's HIL, culminating in a thrilling final on January 10 where SG Pipers were crowned champions. The Men's HIL started on January 3 in Chennai and has now moved into its second phase in Ranchi, featuring several high-voltage matches as the league progresses towards its climax.

Compared to the previous season, which took the entire tournament to reach one billion views, this year's digital engagement has soared, highlighting hockey's growing popularity across platforms including Meta (Instagram and Facebook), YouTube, and X. The HIL YouTube channel alone recorded over 80 million views in the last 28 days, with total watch time exceeding 355,400 hours. Top international audiences include Argentina, the UK, Australia, the US, Germany, Canada, Belgium, Pakistan, Malaysia, South Africa, the Netherlands, Spain, and New Zealand. Around 33 percent of viewers are aged 25–34, and over 20 percent fall between 18–24, reflecting strong youth engagement. Broadcast numbers have also improved dramatically. After six matches, TV viewership rose 37 percent compared to the same stage last season, indicating the sport's growing resonance on Indian television.

Blichfeldt slams playing conditions at India Open; Lakshya wins first match

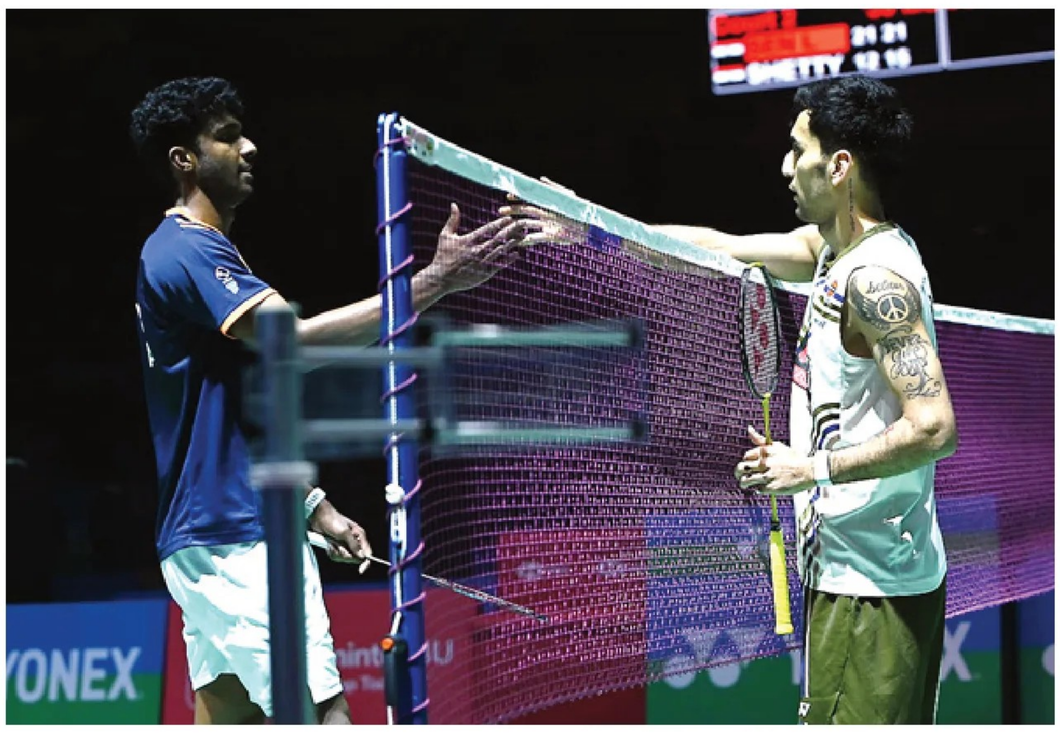
CHENNAI

Even with a change in venue, the India Open found itself under scrutiny on the opening day as Denmark's Mia Blichfeldt voiced strong concerns over playing conditions, reigniting a debate that has lingered since last year's edition. The Super 750 tournament moved from the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall to the Main Arena (Gymnastics Hall) at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex, partly as preparation for hosting the BWF World Championships later this year. Yet, the criticism persisted.

Blichfeldt, ranked World No. 20, was forthright after her straight-games win over Chinese Taipei's Chiu Pin-Chian. The Dane said conditions were "not fair to the players," citing issues such as dirty floors, bird droppings and low temperatures inside the venue. She warned that such factors could affect players' health and their ability to compete in subsequent tournaments. "A lot of us get sick. That's something that needs to be better," she said, while adding that she hoped improvements would be made before the World Championships in August.

Her remarks are likely to draw close attention from both the Badminton World Federation (BWF) and the Badminton Association of India (BAI), with the latter having already described the India Open as a test event ahead of the Worlds. A BAI official at the venue said the setup met BWF regulations and that feedback from the governing body would be taken on board. Later, BAI secretary general Sanjay Mishra clarified that Blichfeldt's comments were largely contextual and related to training areas and personal health sensitivities rather than the main competition arena.

On court, there was cheer for the home fans as Lakshya Sen progressed to the second round. The former champion eased past Ayush Shetty 21-12, 21-15 in an all-Indian men's singles clash, controlling proceedings after a fast start. Lakshya will next face Japan's Kenta Nishimoto as he looks to build momentum in New Delhi.



DECISION ON RCB'S CHINNASWAMY HOME MATCHES EXPECTED NEXT WEEK

BENGALURU

A final decision on whether Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will play its home matches at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium is expected in the coming week, KSCA officials said.

The franchise's potential move has sparked speculation ever since the Maharashtra Cricket Association (MCA) issued a press release earlier this month, thanking RCB for a recce of the MCA stadium in Pune. This fueled rumours that RCB could shift its matches out of Bengaluru.

The Chinnaswamy has faced scrutiny following the tragic stampede on June 4, 2025, during RCB's title celebrations, which claimed 11 lives. Any home games at the venue are contingent on the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) implementing the recommendations of the Justice Michael D'Cunha report, formulated after the incident.

Non-compliance has already impacted domestic cricket. The state government recently denied permission for Vijay Hazare Trophy matches at the stadium, forcing Virat Kohli to play two games for Delhi behind closed doors at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence on the city outskirts. Similarly, Karnataka's upcoming Ranji Trophy clash against Madhya Pradesh on January 22 has been scheduled at Alur Grounds instead of Chinnaswamy.

Vinay Mruthyunjaya, KSCA spokesperson, said, "Talks are ongoing with RCB, and there is no official confirmation about matches moving out of Bengaluru. We will provide a statement next week." Preparatory work at the stadium continues, and the venue's readiness for major events remains under evaluation. The decision on RCB's home fixtures will take into account safety compliance, infrastructure upgrades, and coordination with state authorities.

Fans and stakeholders are watching closely, as the ruling will determine whether defending champions can host matches in front of their home crowd or relocate to an alternate venue for the 2026 IPL season.

RCB Home Venue Decision Pending

A final call on whether Royal Challengers Bengaluru will host IPL home matches at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium is expected next week, KSCA officials said. Speculation grew after the Maharashtra Cricket Association acknowledged RCB's inspection of the Pune stadium. The uncertainty follows the June 4, 2025 stampede during RCB celebrations that killed 11 people. Any games at Chinnaswamy depend on implementing Justice Michael D'Cunha committee recommendations.

ICC Rankings: Virat Kohli Reclaims No.1 ODI Batter Spot after 4 Years

BENGALURU

India's batting stalwart Virat Kohli has returned to the summit of the ICC Men's ODI Batting Rankings, reclaiming the No.1 position after a gap of four years and dislodging compatriot Rohit Sharma from the top spot in the latest update released on Wednesday.

The 37-year-old achieved the numero uno ranking for the 11th time in his illustrious career, underlining his remarkable longevity and consistency in the 50-over format. Kohli's rise has been powered by a string of impressive performances in recent months, including scores of 135, 102 and an unbeaten 65 during India's home ODI series against South Africa in November–December, followed by a fluent 74 not out against Australia in Sydney in October. Kohli first reached the pinnacle of the ODI rankings in October 2013 and has now spent a cumulative 825 days at No.1, the most by any Indian batter. He currently sits 10th on the all-time list of batters with most days at the top, a chart led by West Indies legend Sir Vivian Richards, who dominated the rankings for an extraordinary 2,306 days.

> Veteran Indian star climbs back to top, overtaking Rohit Sharma in ICC ODI rankings

In the latest reshuffle, Rohit Sharma slipped to third place, while New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell climbed to second. The battle for the top ranking is expected to intensify, with just 10 rating points separating the top three batters.

Other notable movements in the ODI batting rankings saw K.L. Rahul move up one place to 11th, while New Zealand opener Devon Conway jumped three spots to 29th. Among bowlers, India pacer Mohammad Siraj climbed five places to 15th, and New Zealand fast bowler Kyle Jamieson surged 27 spots to 69th.

In the ICC Test Rankings, Australia's Travis Head and Steve Smith advanced to third and fourth respectively after centuries in the final Ashes Test. England's Joe Root consolidated his top position, while Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga moved up to second in the T20I bowling rankings.

ICC T20 World Cup 2026: Pak-origin USA players await visa clearance

BENGALURU

Four USA cricketers of Pakistani origin are awaiting visa clearance to travel to India for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, set to begin on February 7 across India and Sri Lanka, according to a report by Cricbuzz.

The players — Ali Khan, Shayan Jahangir, Mohammad Mohsin and Ehsan Adil — are part of the USA squad preparing for the global event and are currently in Sri Lanka for their final tune-up ahead of the tournament, which concludes on March 8. Despite completing their visa appointments on January 13, the quartet is yet to receive their passports stamped, raising concerns over their participation.

The issue gained public attention after pacer Ali Khan posted an Instagram story suggesting that his visa application had been denied. He shared a photograph of himself dining with a teammate, captioned: "India visa denied but KFC for the win." The post triggered speculation about possible diplomatic hurdles affecting the team's preparations.

However, the Cricbuzz report clarified that there has been no formal rejection of the visa applications. Officials familiar with the matter indicated that the process is still ongoing and being handled under standard operating procedures.

"They completed the paperwork as per ICC requirements prior to the appointments. At the appointment, the players were informed that the visas could not be processed at that stage. Later, the USA management received communication from the Indian Embassy stating that some information had been received, while additional inputs were awaited from the Foreign Ministry," the report quoted an ICC source as saying.

Delayed Indian Super League season to kick off next month

NEW DELHI

The long-delayed Indian Super League (ISL) will finally kick off on February 14 after all 14 clubs confirmed their participation, bringing an end to weeks of uncertainty surrounding India's flagship football competition, officials said on Wednesday.

Traditionally played between September and April, the 2025–26 ISL season was thrown into limbo after the commercial rights agreement between the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) — the entity that operated the league — expired on December 9. The lapse left the league without a sponsor or central organiser, triggering serious concerns over its immediate future.

The uncertainty had tangible consequences, with several clubs, including defending champions Mohun Bagan, halting player salary payments and suspending football operations in December. Players and staff were left in limbo as negotiations dragged on behind the scenes.

According to sources, the breakthrough came after the remaining clubs agreed to participate earlier this week. "Many clubs had agreed earlier, but the remaining few came on board on Tuesday," an AIFF source told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. The AIFF is now expected to take a more direct role in running the league. Local media reports suggest the federation has proposed a 20-year plan to take over ISL operations starting this season, signalling a major shift in Indian football's governance structure. Discussions are ongoing to finalise a full home-and-away format, with a 91-match season being considered. Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya had announced last week that all 14 clubs would take part, paving the way for the delayed start.

Yash Rathod rekindles Centre of Excellence love affair

BENGALURU

Yash Rathod's remarkable love affair with the BCCI's Centre of Excellence continued as the Vidarbha batter delivered another telling performance to guide his side into the Vijay Hazare Trophy semifinals.

After a match-winning 194 in the Duleep Trophy final and a solid 71 in the Ranji Trophy opener against Nagaland at the same venue, the 25-year-old once again rose to the occasion, scoring a brisk 86 to earn the Player of the Match award. Rathod's innings, laced with eight fours and two sixes, anchored Vidarbha's innings before their bowlers completed a comprehensive 76-run win over Delhi. Vidarbha's total of 300 for nine was built on a strong foundation laid by Atharva Taide (62) and Dhruv Shorey (49). Taide continued his fine run, bringing up his ninth List A fifty with authoritative off-side strokes, while Shorey looked fluent once the early seam movement subsided. The duo added 90 runs for the third wicket, steadying the innings after early breakthroughs by Ishant Sharma and Navdeep Saini. Rathod then took charge in the final phase, ensuring Vidarbha maximised the last 11 overs, which produced 97 runs. His composure and clean hitting proved decisive on a surface that rewarded positive strokeplay.

In reply, Delhi's chase never truly took off as they were without both their regular skippers — Rishabh Pant and Ayush Badoni — owing to national commitments. Priyansh Arya provided early impetus, but Vidarbha struck back swiftly through Nachiket Bhute, who finished with four wickets.

India Open: Sindhu bows out early; Srikanth, Prannoy march on

NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu made an early exit from the India Open Super 750, while Kidambi Srikanth and H S Prannoy advanced to the second round on a mixed day for the hosts at the USD 950,000 tournament on Wednesday. Sindhu, coming off a semifinal finish at last week's Malaysia Super 1000, started strongly but failed to sustain the momentum, losing 22-20, 12-21, 15-21 to Vietnam's Thuy Linh Nguyen in a 68-minute women's singles contest. After edging a tense opening game, Sindhu struggled with consistency as Nguyen tightened her defense and capitalised on crucial errors in the latter stages. "I don't think it was my day. At this level, small mistakes become decisive," Sindhu said, adding that improving consistency remains her key takeaway from the loss. In men's singles, former world No. 1 Srikanth showed grit to overcome compatriot Tharun Mannepalli 15-21, 21-6, 21-19 in a hard-fought first-round encounter. H S Prannoy, who received a late entry into the draw, made the most of his opportunity by defeating last year's runner-up Lee Cheuk Yiu 22-20, 21-18. Prannoy will next face eighth seed and former world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore. Malvika Bansod also impressed on her return from injury, beating Chinese Taipei's Pai Yu Po 21-18, 21-19.

Alcaraz eyes Australian Open glory as Sinner guards the crown

MELBOURNE

Carlos Alcaraz will arrive at the Australian Open chasing a historic milestone, but the Spaniard's quest for a career Grand Slam faces a formidable obstacle in the shape of reigning champion Jannik Sinner.

At just 22, Alcaraz already owns six Grand Slam titles, yet success at Melbourne Park remains the one major gap in his glittering résumé. In four appearances at the Australian Open, he has failed to progress beyond the quarter-finals, losing at that stage to Novak Djokovic last year and Alexander Zverev in 2024.

"It's my first goal, to be honest," Alcaraz said after winning the US Open last season, his second major title of 2025 following a successful defence at Roland Garros. "When I think about what I want to improve and achieve, the Australian Open is there."

Should he finally conquer Melbourne, Alcaraz would become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam, eclipsing compatriot Rafael Nadal, who achieved the feat by the age of 24.

Standing in his path is Italy's Sinner, the two-time defending champion who is seeking a slice of history himself. A third straight Australian Open title would place the 24-year-old alongside Novak Djokovic as the only men in the Open era to achieve a Melbourne three-peat — something Djokovic managed twice during his record haul of 10 titles.

"I feel like a better player than last year," Sinner warned after finishing the 2025 season with 58 wins and just six losses. He famously fought back from two sets down to beat Daniil Medvedev in the 2024 final before dispatching Zverev in straight sets last year.

The rivalry between Alcaraz and Sinner, dubbed "Sincaraz", has defined the men's game, with the pair sharing the last eight Grand Slam titles.

MOHAMMAD NABI snaps over Bangladesh reporter's Mustafizur Rahman IPL row

DHAKA

Veteran Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammad Nabi appeared visibly irritated after being asked about the Indian Premier League (IPL) controversy involving Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman during a post-match press conference in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The incident took place following a BPL match between Noakhali Express and Dhaka Capitals, for whom Nabi is representing Noakhali alongside his 19-year-old son Hasan Eisakhil. During the media interaction, a Bangladeshi reporter sought Nabi's views on the ongoing row surrounding Mustafizur Rahman's removal from the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) squad ahead of IPL 2026. Nabi, however, shut down the question sharply, making it clear that the issue had no relevance to him and that he had no interest in being drawn into political or administrative matters. Responding in Hindi, the Afghan cricketer said, "Iska mere se kya lena dena bhai? Main Mustafizur se kaise related hoon? Mujhe politics se koi lena dena nahi hai."

He added that while he acknowledged Rahman as a quality bowler, the line of questioning was misplaced. "I know he is a good bowler and all that, but the way you are questioning, it's not related to me," Nabi told the reporter, underlining his discomfort with the topic. The exchange comes at a time when cricketing ties in the region are under scrutiny. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has sent a second formal letter to the International Cricket Council (ICC), citing security concerns over travelling to India for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which begins on February 7.

The BCB has reiterated its demand to shift Bangladesh's matches to Sri Lanka, though the ICC is yet to issue an official response.

Tensions escalated further after the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) asked KKR to remove Mustafizur Rahman from their IPL squad.

Alcaraz, Sabalenka Top Seeds as Australian Open Draw Nears

MELBOURNE

Carlos Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka were named the top seeds for the Australian Open on Wednesday, just a day before the draw for the season's first Grand Slam at Melbourne Park. World No. 1 Alcaraz leads the men's field as he targets a maiden Australian Open crown. The Spaniard is followed by two-time defending champion Jannik Sinner, with Alexander Zverev seeded third and 10-time champion Novak Djokovic fourth as he continues his pursuit of yet another major title. The seedings reflect a changing of the guard at the top of men's tennis, with Alcaraz and Sinner establishing themselves as the leading forces, while Djokovic remains a formidable presence despite advancing age. Italy's Lorenzo Musetti completes the top five, while home favourite Alex de Minaur is seeded sixth, raising local hopes of a deep run.

In the women's draw, Sabalenka heads the seedings for the second consecutive year, with Iga Świątek and Coco Gauff ranked second and third respectively. The trio once again underline their consistency at the highest level, having dominated the top of the rankings throughout the past season.

American Madison Keys returns to Melbourne as the defending champion and is seeded ninth, one of four US players among the women's top 10 seeds. Naomi Osaka, continuing her comeback after injury and time away from the tour, is seeded 16th and remains a dangerous floater in the draw.

The Australian Open begins on Sunday, with expectations of intense early-round clashes and potential blockbuster meetings later in the fortnight as the world's best players vie for the first Grand Slam title of 2026.

City Hilights (English Daily) published by P. Sunil Kumar (Publisher) on behalf of Immaculate Broadcasting Consortium World News (P) Ltd., No. 18, JRV Court, Queens's Road, Bengaluru – 560001 and printed at Manipal Media Network Limited Opp. Govt School, Kempalinganahalli, Near Kunigal Cross, Nelamangala TQ, Bangalore Rural Dist. -562123, Printed at No-7/2 plot no.CA-3/1,28(p)&29(p) Kapanoor 2nd Stage Industrial Area Kapnoor Village Kalaburagi -585104. Printed at S. J. R. V. Printers, No. 208 Plot No. B-019 KSSIDC Industrial Area, Irfan Ahamed Khan Pathan, 4th Main Road Gamanagatti, Hubballi-Dharwad – 580025. and Elegant Offset Printers Pvt. Ltd. No. 5-61/1, Shed No. M-6, Yeyyadi Industrial Estate, Yeyyadi, Mangalore - 575 008. (RNI No: KARENG / 2015 / 63243), Regd. No. BGGPO-2581/2017-2019 Posted at Bengaluru PSO-560026 Email - cityhilights.news@gmail.com Phone: 080-41209042. Copyright. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is prohibited.